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**Irenaeus, Joseph Smith, and the Sociology of Heresy**

**by**

**Adam J. Powell**

**Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Durham University  
Department of Theology and Religion**

**2013**

## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis attempts to illustrate the salience of the concept ‘heresy’ for sociologically-informed studies of religious violence and opposition by removing it from its traditional moorings in historical theology and applying it to two religious movements: second-century Christians and nineteenth-century Mormons. Divided into two major sections, the study pursues its objective first by surveying available definitions of heresy (theological and sociological) and offering its own understanding of heresy as a Weberian ideal type of religious opposition. Part One of the study concludes with a look at the sociology of knowledge in general and the theory of identity adumbrated by Hans Mol in particular, appropriating each in order to outline the social process whereby religious groups facing opposition come to elaborate complex soteriologies capable of resolving the conflict.

The second half of the thesis involves a close examination of early Christians and early Mormons, providing a detailed description of the types of social opposition each group faced and juxtaposing the two communities in an effort to illuminate unique historical patterns of social marginalisation. Following this investigation of each group’s religious milieu and corresponding persecution, the study engages the soteriologies articulated by Irenaeus and Joseph Smith, paying particular attention to the connections between specific forms of opposition and the way in which espousing deification helped resolve such ‘heresy’. The thesis concludes with thoughts on the relationship between adaptable belief systems (such as the forms of deification expressed by Irenaeus and Joseph Smith) and the future success of new religious movements.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1840, Mormon believer Lorenzo Snow uttered an unforgettable couplet: ‘As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be.’ Though never officially acknowledged as doctrinal, Mormonism’s founder Joseph Smith told Snow in 1843 that the idea was from God and was true.<sup>1</sup> Many centuries earlier, a Christian bishop in Gaul, Irenaeus, stated that Jesus Christ became human ‘in order to make us what he is.’<sup>2</sup> In this way, and separated by wide expanses of time and geography, both the second-century Christians and the nineteenth-century Mormons espoused forms of deification. For both parties, soteriology and theological anthropology overlapped; the hope of salvation was not relegated to the intellect nor to the future but was increasingly understood as entailing individual progress in the here and now.

Indeed, as this thesis will argue, for both groups, an emphasis on progression arose out of experiences of acute persecution and social marginalisation. Much as William Blake touched on this reality ‘Without contraries is no progression.’<sup>3</sup> For, in encountering hostility and external agonistic influences, early Christians and Mormons articulated soteriologies focused on deification, soteriologies developed in a dialectical relationship with circumstances of opposition.<sup>4</sup> As New Testament scholar Heikki Räisänen notes concerning early Christianity, one should view the first two centuries of doctrinal development as a ‘living, dynamic process’ in which beliefs

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald N. Lund, ‘Is President Lorenzo Snow’s oft-repeated Statement – “As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be” – accepted as Official Doctrine by the Church?’ *Ensign* 38(February 1982), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V.Preface. English quotes from *Against Heresies* (hereafter, *AH*) are taken from Robert M. Grant’s *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997) when available. Otherwise, the English translation is that of: Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, volumes 5 and 9 (Edinburgh, 1868). Additional Irenaeus passages from *On the Apostolic Preaching* (hereafter, *Dem.*) (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> William Blake, ‘Marriage of Heaven and Hell,’ *Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. W.H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1989), 105.

<sup>4</sup> A particularly helpful term which encapsulates the specifically sociological form of opposition with which we are concerned is ‘agonism’. In the pages to follow, agonism is often used to refer to conflict between social groups. This is appropriate given that the original Greek *ἀγών* referred to the gathering of individuals for the purpose of competition. Agonism, then, is applied to opposition with a competitive element.



emerged through interaction with social experiences, ‘often conflict experiences’.<sup>5</sup> In the following pages we adopt this general view, applying it to early Mormonism as well as to Christianity in the second century.<sup>6</sup> Maintaining a balance in the relevant data for both parties and framing it all with sociologically-informed theory, our study attempts to assay the varied circumstances and contexts of each group with an eye for the interface of religious opposition and evolving soteriologies. We will come to see the perceived need for salvation in the midst of suffering as a mobilising and potent force, motivating some to embrace universalism and driving others to geographical and ideological isolation. Indeed, one should not assume that the marginal social status of any one religious group is a matter of choice for its members; they may, and the Mormons are key to the thesis on this point, integrate alienation into their beliefs in order to benefit from that which was once understood as detrimental. Just as *Homo religiosus* adapts to survive, so the religious collective adapts. In the end, complex notions of salvation in which a form of deification is espoused may serve as one adaptive means of ameliorating social friction and safeguarding identity for the opposed group and its members.

In the following work, then, we explore the reason(s) behind the existence of seemingly similar theological anthropologies and soteriologies among quite dissimilar religious groups and propose the presence of an ‘elective affinity’ between groups experiencing certain types of opposition (expressed in terms of heresy) during formative years and soteriological schemas which account for this resistance. As a heuristic tool borrowed from Max Weber, who in turn borrowed the idea from Goethe,<sup>7</sup> ‘elective affinities’ refer to seemingly natural attractions between sets of social phenomena given specific contextual circumstances, such as the apparent affinity that we will highlight between certain religious groups and certain belief

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<sup>5</sup> Heikki Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>6</sup> We define ‘early’ Mormonism as the period of Joseph Smith’s leadership, from the founding of the movement in 1830 to Smith’s assassination in 1844.

<sup>7</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* [The Elective Affinities] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971); Torbern Olof Bergman, *A Dissertation on Elective Attractions* (London: J. Murray, 1785). Goethe, of course, adopted the term from Bergman, a Swedish chemist noted for his exhaustive charting of chemical affinities.

systems.<sup>8</sup> The chief and driving questions of this study arose as a result of a previous theological analysis of the distinctive types of deification promulgated by Irenaeus and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).<sup>9</sup> Whilst that previous comparison emphasised the disparity between these two forms of deification it also engendered additional queries that are easily summarised in question form. So, though the two parties are ultimately expressing different beliefs, why do they exhibit any similarities at all? Why would any religious group, particularly any strand or derivative of Christianity, come to believe in deification? Having already explored the similarities and differences between the two systems in terms of theological and philosophical claims, it became evident that these unanswered questions were essentially social-scientific in nature.

### **Method and Approach**

Consequently, in order to investigate the apparent affinity between groups experiencing opposition in their early stages of development and soteriologies involving deification, this study adopts an approach from the sociology of religion, as a discipline that attempts to reveal and explain observable social patterns manifested in religious phenomena. Such patterns may appear cross-culturally as well as during different historical eras. For example, the threat of social subversion and similar experiences of localised persecution that link second-century Christians with early Mormons also surface in the account of seventeenth-century Quakers in Massachusetts. In an insightful application of the sociology of deviance, Kai Erikson, for example, highlights the manner by which those Quakers lost identity and enthusiasm as a result of England's successful suppression of Puritan violence against Quaker missionaries.<sup>10</sup> This is not unlike Terryl Givens' claim that the general

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<sup>8</sup> Max Weber, 'Die Protestantische Ethik und der "Geist" des Kapitalismus,' *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 20(1905): 54. In this essay, Weber states his objective as determining whether and to what extent 'elective affinities' exist between certain religious faiths and work ethics. In a later English translation this would be changed to 'correlations' (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2004), 49.). For a catalogue of Weber's uses of the term as well as a thorough synopsis of the debates surrounding its definition, see Richard Herbert Howe, 'Max Weber's Elective Affinities: Sociology within the Bounds of Pure Reason,' *American Journal of Sociology* 84.2(1978): 366-85.

<sup>9</sup> Adam J. Powell, *Deification, Exaltation, and Progression: The Theological Anthropologies of Irenaeus and the Latter-day Saints*, M.A. dissertation (Wayland Baptist University, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Kai Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1966), 125.

acceptance of Mormons after their denunciation of polygamy in the late nineteenth century resulted in a decrease of commitment as individual adherents were forced to question their desire to retain membership.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the question of whether and to what extent such patterns exist may be less significant than the question of how to approach an analysis of those patterns. It is one thing to adopt the general sociological axiom that behind any theology stands a particular anthropology,<sup>12</sup> but it is something more to choose historical examples and delve into both their unique instances of pain and distress as well as their salvific hopes. In the pages that follow, we agree with Javier Garrido's straightforward observation that 'there is no religion from abstract thought, only from the concrete experience of life...'<sup>13</sup> However, we will employ abstract theoretical notions grounded in empirical data to illumine the concrete experiences of second-century Christians and early Mormons. By doing so, we are able to explore the social processes that produce complex soteriologies capable of resolving and absorbing opposition, offering group members a fortified identity as a result.

Although we stand firm in asserting that the comparative method is basic to the study of religion, our analysis of second-century Christians alongside early Mormons is much more than an arbitrary one-to-one comparison. Not only are there numerous similarities between the two groups, such as each community's eagerness to connect to ancient Israelites, experiences of localised persecution, and marginal status within their respective societies, but our investigation also attempts to utilise each group as separate illustrations of a single social process. By focusing on the thoughts of Irenaeus (representing the second century) and Joseph Smith (representing the Mormons of the early-mid nineteenth century), we are able to illuminate both the similar social circumstances and the soteriological principles of the two parties whilst

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<sup>11</sup> Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1857), 34; Georg Simmel, *Essays on Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 111; Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [1912] (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 469. Feuerbach notably asserted that 'the object and contents of the Christian religion are altogether human.' His claim, though highly contested, made a lasting impact on the study of religion, and his basic argument is echoed in the sociological works of Simmel and Durkheim. Each of the latter see religion as the product of human interaction, thus religious systems reflect social values, needs, objectives, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Javier Garrido, *Proceso humano y Gracia de Dios: Apuntes de espiritualidad Cristiana* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1996), 27.

producing a nuanced juxtaposition rather than a heavy-handed comparison. The Mormon case, perhaps, is a more obvious study in the crystallisation of doctrine during the embryonic stages of a new religious movement, given the abundant historical record documenting all minutiae of nineteenth-century anti-Mormonism. However, second-century Christianity is far from a dubious analogue, for that period, too, witnessed a concentrated, intentional effort at self-definition in relation to Judaism as well as the related issue of doctrinal development, largely due to societal opposition against what was, at the time, still a minority movement in the empire.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the second century is of special importance for our study as both Justin and Irenaeus (influential figures of the time) have been cited as the ‘inventors’ of the traditional, theological notion of heresy.<sup>15</sup> In support of our contention that persecution and opposition serve as catalysts for the articulation of identity and beliefs, it is instructive to survey the contexts and experiences of Christians in the second century as a group that may serve as a sort of antecedent to the phenomena seen among Mormons during the religious fervour of early nineteenth-century America.

Thus, with these religious movements as illustrative examples, we pursue the notion of an elective affinity between opposition and deification. Expressed differently, the following study endeavours to explore the notion that certain experiences are involved in a dialectical relationship with certain beliefs. To achieve this end, we make use of the sociology of knowledge in general as well as Hans Mol’s sociological theory of identity in particular. In its essence, the sociology of knowledge recognises that groups come to understand the world through socially-legitimated interpretations of reality. Yet, societal conflict and persecution affect individual believers equally as much as the collective, and the following chapters

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<sup>14</sup> Philippa Townsend, ‘Who Were the First Christians?’, *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, eds. Eduardo Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 212. Townsend argues that second-century Christians were the first to define themselves as a separate community from Judaism.

<sup>15</sup> Alain Le Bouleec, *La notion d’hérésie dans la littérature grecque IIe-IIIe siècles* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985), 1.110-12. G.E.M. De Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 212. Le Bouleec is frequently cited as one of the first to attribute this significance to these two writers. In particular, he proposed that Justin created the literary genre of heresiology irreversibly altering the meaning of the term heresy. Ste Croix cites Le Bouleec but adds that the significance of Justin and Irenaeus lies in their establishment of heretical lineages. He claims that these ‘genealogies’ ‘established opposition between the apostolic succession of the church and the succession of all heresies from Simon Magus’. This will be important in chapter one when heresy is defined not as an inside influence but as an exogenous force.

acknowledge this by deploying Mol's theoretical contributions to the study of religious identity. In fact, we take his assertion that a dialectic between identity and adaptability undergirds much of social existence as something of a driving predictor of both the ability of soteriologies to confer identity on adherents and of the link between adaptability and the future success of those religious groups who face opposition. Suggesting that religious groups *and* individual believers both conserve their identities within stable orders and adapt to changing circumstances, Mol adumbrates a theoretical model that is almost uniquely relevant for answering our primary research questions. Early Christians and early Mormons encountered threats to solidarity and social stability in the form of acute external opposition, and both groups resolved the potential crises by articulating stabilising soteriological systems capable of conferring stronger identities, a function made plausible by inbuilt flexibility in the belief system. Though some scholars, such as Stephen Taysom, acknowledge the high degree of tension demonstrated by Mormons in relation to their American milieu, few (if any) recognise the salience of Mol's sociological theory for understanding how such groups survive by avoiding the inherently deleterious potential of that social tension.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, we combine the group focus of the sociology of knowledge with the individual, interpretive focus of Mol to analyse the relationship between religious opposition and soteriological belief. Of course, our study is indebted to those in other disciplines who present noteworthy scholarship concerning the evolution of identity and boundary maintenance within religious groups of history.<sup>17</sup> As we proceed with our assessment, the reader will encounter the outcome of a number of key methodological decisions. For instance, when discussing primary sources from the second century including the works of Irenaeus, Greek and Latin usage is limited to a very few cases in which the original text and/or meaning is germane to our argument.

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen C. Taysom, *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds: Conflicting Visions, Contested Boundaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 197. Taysom notes that tension models are inadequate in explaining groups that display even higher levels of tension than Mormonism, such as the Branch Davidians. It is possible, however, that Mol's model is capable of assisting the study of a wider range of religious traditions.

<sup>17</sup> For examples, see John Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and Averil Cameron, 'The Violence of Orthodoxy,' *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, eds. Eduardo Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

This choice not only helps the general flow of the content but allows us to dedicate more space to social topics by restricting notes related to matters of translation. Of course, identity is one of the most important of those social topics to be studied and, given the nature of the material, the discussion of identity in Irenaeus differs slightly from the discussion of identity in Joseph Smith, the former case suffering from a relative lack of historical documentation when compared with the latter case. Beyond these methodological concerns, the present study is built on a terminological foundation which must be grasped before its analytical framework can be elucidated. Subsequent chapters offer fresh insight into a number of topics concerning persecution and belief, but those incisive outcomes are enabled by our distinctive understanding of the following terms.

### **Heresy**

For our purposes, heresy is understood as religious agonistic conflict. By removing the term from its theological and historical roots, we are better able to see its utility for the study of social opposition in a wide field of contexts and can demonstrate such usefulness by applying it to second-century Christians and early Mormons. Applying the term to such cases also pays homage to the word's original Greek usage. *Αἵρεσις* simply meant 'choice' when it was employed among the Greek philosophers, and this came to refer to an individual's choice to join any number of philosophical schools. Quite naturally, then, an element of competition lay implicit in the term. However, its utilisation by key Christian figures such as Paul in the first century and Justin in the second resulted in a pejorative connotation; heresy was still in some sense a choice, but it was the wrong choice, a rejection of the truth.

In this study we will approach heresy as a threefold ideal type of religious opposition, comprised of societal, doctrinal, and personal elements. Chapter One discusses Max Weber's concept of 'ideal types' as helpful analytical constructs before explicating this detailed, and sociologically-informed, definition of heresy. Here, we simply highlight the unique understanding of heresy that weaves throughout the study. The words of Jacques Berlinerblau are instructive for introducing the notion of a sociology of heresy:

In order to be a legitimate object of sociological scrutiny, the pairings of heterodoxy and orthodoxy must be a phenomenon that may be identified across different times and places. In other words, if this nexus were not a recurring phenomenon, it would be pointless to develop something like a

sociological theory, or better yet an ‘ideal-type,’ to describe its most general features. As an aggregate, historians and theologians who study this topic seem to confirm that heresy/orthodoxy is a relation that can be identified in manifold historical contexts.<sup>18</sup>

Viewing Berlinerblau’s statement as both insightful and persuasive, the following pages explore two of those contexts in the hope of shedding light on some of the ‘general features’ of social heresy. We also note, however, that heresy demands resolution, and the religious groups that face intense opposition in their early stages often find the articulation of complex soteriological systems helpful for addressing the potentially debilitating consequences of acute opposition and ensuring the maintenance of religious identity in the midst of such circumstances.

### **Soteriological Schema**

Throughout the present study, those soteriological systems are referred to as soteriological schemas. We have chosen ‘schema’ over alternative terms, such as structure or narrative, because when belief systems are expressed as a means of resolving heresy they often entail more than narrative theology or detailed doctrine. Likewise, due to theoretical ‘schools’ and movements within the social sciences over the past century, ‘structure’ has acquired strong connotations that might confuse and mislead the reader. Not wanting to invoke the language of Claude Lévi-Strauss or others committed to a structuralist approach but desiring to emphasise the complexity and efficacy of soteriologies as overarching interpretive systems, we employ the term ‘schemas’ and note their relationship to the resolution of heresy. In some sense, we understand the specific soteriological schemas assayed in the present study as synonymous with deification, using the two interchangeably in some instances. Yet, there is always a basic assumption that soteriological schemas refer to more generalised phenomena beyond our two historical cases, whereas deification is the predominant characteristic of those two particular systems. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of soteriological schemas is to offer an ordered meaning system capable of integrating heresy and conferring resilient identities on the group and its members, a

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<sup>18</sup> Jacques Berlinerblau, ‘Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and *Doxa*,’ *History of Religions* 40.4 (2001): 333.

notion largely based on Mol's dialectic between stability (or identity) and change (or adaptability).<sup>19</sup>

## **Two Structural Pillars**

Finally, we should include the two principal pillars on which our study is erected. First, we argue that heresy is a salient analytical tool for the study of religion, especially when defined as an ideal type of religious opposition. Second, we explore the elective affinity between new religious movements facing heresy (second-century Christians and early Mormons) and the deifying soteriologies that they come to espouse. These two topics guide our analysis and encapsulate its basic organisational structure.

## **Thesis Outline**

The following analysis is separated into two sections. In 'The Role of Heresy: Social and Doctrinal Impact', we include two chapters addressing the sociology of heresy. Chapter One surveys the available literature on the topic of heresy, paying particular attention to past attempts to develop a sociological approach to the issue before offering our own definition. The first half of Chapter Two then provides a critical overview of the theoretical assumptions and foundations informing our later exploration of Christians and Mormons, followed by an in-depth theoretical explication of the social processes whereby persecuted groups expound soteriological schemas in the second half of the chapter.

The second section, 'Surviving and Integrating Heresy', comprises the focused study of our two illustrative religious groups. This begins with Chapter Three and a consideration of the historical contexts of both parties. Juxtaposing the two movements and elucidating the threefold heresy that each movement faced goes far toward lending fresh insight to topics such as religious persecution and sets the stage for Chapter Four in which the Mormon 'Plan of Salvation' and the Irenaean 'Economy of Salvation' are analysed as soteriological schemas with particular emphasis on the way heresy is integrated into the meaning systems and identity is conferred on the believers. Individual identity within the soteriological schema is defined as the soteriological self, a specific understanding of place and purpose based

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<sup>19</sup> Hans Mol, *Identity and the Sacred* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), 70.



on notions of deification in which the believer views the present life as a salvific opportunity to progress.<sup>20</sup>

Following the fourth chapter, the conclusion summarises the basic content of the study before offering additional, related insights. By highlighting the inherent flexibility of the soteriological schemas as well as listing specific historical instances of altered doctrines, the concluding chapter argues that heresy (as opposition) benefits religious identity by testing its conceptual elasticity. This illustration of the inbuilt virtues of soteriological schemas for religious groups who have survived heresy also helps us answer our original question of the nature of the link (elective affinity) between persecuted groups and complex soteriological beliefs which allows for individual progress of the believer whilst establishing a secure collective identity.

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<sup>20</sup> Eugene Weiner and Anita Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction: A Sociological Analysis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 7, 28-9. For our notion of the soteriological self, we are partially indebted to Weiner and Weiner's description of 'social types' as dynamic 'characters' who 'function within specific social contexts' and cannot do otherwise (as, for instance, 'actors' can).

PART ONE

**THE ROLE OF HERESY:  
SOCIAL AND DOCTRINAL IMPACT**

*‘Happiness and misery, wisdom and folly, virtue and vice...All advantages are attended with disadvantages.’<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 183.

## CHAPTER ONE

### HERESY AS OPPOSITION: DEBATES AND DEFINITIONS

In order to explore potential elective affinities between persecuted religious groups and soteriologies involving varieties of deification, we begin by redefining ‘heresy’ in sociological terms. The justification for this approach lies in the fact that many of these groups invoke heresiological language when describing their opponents. Not only do the terms ‘heresy’ and ‘heretic’ appear in the writings and oral pronouncements of such religious communities, but these terms fittingly characterise the tense social relationship between religious insiders and those who oppose them. Thus, heresy serves as an appropriate descriptor of the sociological phenomenon observed when physical and ideological agonism results in the articulation of complex soteriological schemas by those religious groups facing such hostility. This sort of heresy is best understood as opposition to the solidarity of the group, a multifarious attack not only on the beliefs but also against the physical health and social position of the group and its members. Adopting and appropriating this theological/historical nomenclature of heresy, heterodoxy, orthodoxy, etc. for the study of religious opposition and social marginalisation also casts fresh light on the nuances and contours of historical social conflicts.

Before exploring existing sociological perspectives on heresy and adumbrating our own, it is informative to note the long history of enmity between those who locate themselves within the ranks of the ‘orthodox’ and those they label ‘heretics’. Although the distinction may seem obvious to some, there is little consensus over the developmental sequence of the two categories. In many cases, for instance, it could be argued that the concept of heretical teaching is actually solidified prior to that of dogma.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is easily explained; aberrant ideas threaten to stretch notions of

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<sup>1</sup> This is may be the case with Irenaeus, one of the very first apologists and systematic theologians. Irenaeus articulated his discourse on Christian doctrine as a refutation to the claims of various ‘Gnostics’. Though he preferred to view himself as preserving and presenting the rule of faith handed down since the earliest times of the Church, the formulation of Christian orthodoxy found in his writings is often acknowledged as the first cohesive, systematic theology composed by a church father. From a historical perspective, then, his presentation of doctrine *follows* the expression of heresy.

truth beyond established parameters and, therefore, provide impetus for the internal crystallisation of belief.<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising, however, that this formula has been contested by various scholars concerned with the history of doctrine. Until early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example, it was taken for granted by Church historians that orthodoxy was in some sense ‘right’ and heresy was ‘wrong’. For many, this ‘rightness’ was related to the notion of correct doctrine, a belief that history has preserved the original teachings of the earliest Christians, combating aberrant notions as they arose. In this sense, orthodoxy was not simply the articulation of triumphant beliefs in the early years of Christianity but was, instead, the accurate and absolutely true expression of Christian beliefs over and above competing conceptions. Anglican-turned-Catholic John Henry Newman notably upheld this view in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and other writings by arguing that, though doctrine was systematised in response to the presence of heresy, the truth found in orthodoxy had been preserved by the Roman Catholic Church since the time of the earliest church fathers.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it was possible for Newman to speak of an ‘apostolic legacy, preserved and dispensed by the church’ whilst also explaining the struggle which ensues between heresy and orthodoxy:

Such is the general course of religious error; which rises within the sacred precincts, but in vain endeavours to take root in a soil uncongenial to it. The domination of heresy, however prolonged, is but one stage in its existence; it ever hastens to an end, and that end is the triumph of the Truth.<sup>4</sup>

This war between heresy and truth in the thoughts of Newman is what Thomas Ferguson calls a ‘dialectic opposition’.<sup>5</sup> In his essay on Newman’s understanding of heresy, Ferguson repeatedly characterises Newman’s historical hermeneutic as an *a priori* belief in ‘heresy producing orthodoxy’.<sup>6</sup> This was only true, however, in that

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<sup>2</sup> The issue of whether the threat is external or internal to the group in question will be addressed more thoroughly later in the chapter.

<sup>3</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1974); *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891).

<sup>4</sup> Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, 54, 393.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Ferguson, ‘The Enthralling Power: History and Heresy in John Henry Newman,’ *Anglican Theological Review* 85.4 (2003): 653.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 645, 51, 53, 59.

heresy instigated the conflict which forced the Church to wield the ‘undefeatable truth’ in order to overcome the falsehood of the heretical.<sup>7</sup> In this way, orthodoxy arose from the conflict but was itself the articulation of the preserved truth. Heresy, on the other hand, was not simply a false belief arising from within the Church; instead, it was an outside influence ‘under the garb of sound religion’.<sup>8</sup>

Although Newman’s work has seen serious contestation in the years since its first publication, its scholarly significance at the time was duly acknowledged.<sup>9</sup> Even so, sceptical scholars tended to question the process whereby this orthodox majority ‘won out’ over competing views as well as the validity of supposing that the winning perspectives were held by a majority. In Walter Bauer’s pivotal publication, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* for example, a sceptical outlook was evident as the *sine qua non*. First published in Germany in 1934, this text substantially affected the study of heresy and heretics in the early years of Christianity by arguing that the early heresiologists either inadvertently interpreted their situation incorrectly or intentionally employed rhetoric when stating that heresy infiltrated from the outside.<sup>10</sup> In Bauer’s view, those ideas that came to be known as heretical were almost always present from the earliest moments of Christianity. Based on this fact, Bauer was one of the first to suggest that ‘heresy’ and ‘orthodoxy’, as labels, were far from useful for scholars. Though the Christian church eventually understood heresy as right belief gone wrong, this was not the case in many parts of the empire, and Bauer contended that competing doctrines existed, in areas such as Asia Minor, from the very beginning of the religion.

This argument, now known as ‘The Bauer Thesis’, has received much attention since its first presentation in English. Many scholars have challenged Bauer’s interpretation of history, refutations coming from many directions. Patristic

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 652.

<sup>8</sup> *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, 103. Newman’s thoughts are important for the present study because he believes that heresy is essentially the external work of Satan against the Church. He repeatedly offers this opinion and, in doing so, supports our contention later in this chapter that heresy is frequently an exogenous threat instead of a sort of inside divergence.

<sup>9</sup> Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 5. Williams refers to Newman’s claim that the Antiochene church allowed syncretistic, pagan philosophy to establish heresy whilst the Alexandrian church preserved the truth as ‘historical fantasy.’ Indeed, both churches were influenced by pagan philosophy and Arius was himself a priest in Alexandria.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (New York: Fortress Press, 1971), 90.

scholar, and Roman Catholic, Lewis Ayres recently introduced a volume of the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* dealing with the development of orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup> In this preamble, Ayres intimates the two-fold nature of the various rebuttals to Bauer's notions stating that the thesis is typically denied due to: 1) The fact that Bauer's 'examples have turned out to be unconvincing as scholarship on the second and third centuries has progressed', and 2) The majority of important studies on early Christian beliefs reject 'the idea that we can narrate a monolithic story of heresy becoming orthodoxy.'<sup>12</sup> Other recent critiques of Bauer have come from scholars such as Andreas J. Köstenberger, Michael J. Kruger, and others.<sup>13</sup> Our acknowledgement of the wide refutations of Bauer is not to suggest, however, that Bauer's thoughts were insignificant for early Christian studies or even that his thesis has been unanimously discarded.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to note, however, that Bauer's work was not made available in English until almost forty years after it first appeared in German. Consequently, many English-speaking historians continued to produce work which presupposed the utility of the labels applied by early heresiologists, and, in most cases, this material was embedded in books and articles concerning early church history in general, much less common were those texts meant to address the issue of orthodoxy and heresy in particular.<sup>15</sup> However, since the 1970s the study of heresy has taken a number of

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis Ayres, 'Introduction,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14.4 (2006): 395-98.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>13</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010). For further discussion concerning the reception of Bauer's thesis, see: Daniel J. Harrington, 'The Reception of Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* during the Last Decade,' *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 287-98; Michael Desjardins, 'Bauer and Beyond: On Recent Scholarly Discussion of Hairesis in the Early Christian Era,' *The Second Century* 8 (1991): 65-82; Charles Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 14-45.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, Bart Ehrman, an extremely successful author and professor at University of North Carolina, has been described as the new proponent of the Bauer Thesis. Ehrman's work focuses on both the relativity inherent in the term 'orthodoxy' as well as the varied personal agendas tainting the writings of the heresiologists and others involved in the development of early doctrine.

<sup>15</sup> Published in 1976 (5 years after Bauer's book was printed in English), David Christie-Murray's *A History of Heresy* (London: New English Library, 1976) is a splendid example of the times. Christie-Murray composed the work as a sort of compact encyclopaedia of heresy. Here, 'heresy' was taken for granted as that identified as such by the church. Again, this was history as categorized by late antique authors.

different paths; some have echoed Bauer's claims whilst others have echoed his tone. More importantly, the discoveries of Nag Hammadi provided impetus for re-evaluations of 'Gnosticism' and other belief systems traditionally labelled heretical.<sup>16</sup> Though not all agree on the religious environment of the Graeco-Roman world, there is something of a consensus with regards to the existence of opposition in Christian history.

Indeed, opposition is integral to our analysis of heresy and the development of soteriological schemas. Not only does the idea of religious opposition permeate the present theoretical discussion, but it is also key for our later examination of second-century Christianity and nineteenth-century Mormonism, two religious movements that nearly seamlessly incorporated opposition into their narrative theology and, thus, into their identities. We need not search long to find other, rather unexpected, references to the role of opposition in the human experience in general or the human religious experience in particular. For example, the philosopher David Hume, whose words form the epigram opening Part One of the present study, repeatedly notes the presence of opposition in humanity's religious impulses. Believing that the earliest forms of religion, polytheistic systems, arose out of humans experiencing opposition in their everyday lives, Hume asserted that as individuals witnessed the contradictory characteristics of nature, such as the unrelenting harshness of winter and the new life of spring, they began to posit various supernatural beings as opposed forces driving the natural world.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, many other philosophers also note the significance of opposition and otherness. Hegel, for instance, believes that God is a 'conscious' entity because of the divine ability to recognise otherness, encountering otherness is the action during which one becomes aware of what he or she is not. This resembles Emmanuel Lévinas' concept of 'alterity' as cognizance of the otherness of the other.<sup>18</sup> For Lévinas, a lack of alterity leads to hostility, misunderstanding, and violent conflict.

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<sup>16</sup> Throughout our study, 'Gnosticism' is expressed with initial capitalisation and inverted commas in order to highlight the tension between using the term in reference to a monolithic movement and our awareness that the historical record suggests little cohesion between the various groups labelled 'Gnostic' by the early heresiologists. With regards to Irenaeus, it is understood that his opponents are most frequently the Valentinians.

<sup>17</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 139.

<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Altérité et Transcendance* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2006).

Thus, the Holocaust was the ultimate example of a lack of alterity, for if one group had recognized the defining, unique characteristics of the other, violence may have been avoided. In a sense, these ideas from Hume and others are strikingly similar to those of another formative thinker, psychologist Sigmund Freud who located the human desire for religion in the shared experience of opposition from nature and civilisation:

The gods retain their threefold task: they must exorcize the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is sown in death, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them.<sup>19</sup>

For Hume, as for Freud, belief in the supernatural was a function of agonistic experience.

As we continue with the present investigation of heresy and the particular topics of our study come into ever sharper focus, it is significant to recognise that the notion of opposition as a developmental catalyst for religion extends beyond Western thinkers of the modern era. One might highlight, for instance, the importance of Jacob's 'wrestling' with God in Genesis 32:24-28. In this scene, Jacob is said to have 'wrestled' (24-25) and 'struggled' (28) with God and is given a new name, Israel. This struggle is from the Hebrew *sarîta*, meaning 'persisted', for the father of the twelve tribes became a patriarch through his resilient struggle with opposing forces, 'with God and with men' (28).<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the New Testament expresses a sort of tension between those claiming orthodoxy and their heretical targets. For example, Jack Sanders points to Colossians 2 and its illustration of one Christian group opposing Jewish heresy.<sup>21</sup> In this Pauline epistle, the apostle exhorts his audience to defend themselves against those who would take them 'captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of

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<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973), 14.

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting here that the Book of Mormon also includes a character 'wrestling' with God. Enos is said to have 'cried unto [God] in mighty prayer and supplication...all the day long' until his sins were finally forgiven because of his 'faith in Christ'. *The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 1981), Enos 1:3-8. All Book of Mormon (BOM), Doctrine and Covenants (D&C), and Pearl of Great Price (PGP) references are taken from this edition unless otherwise noted (see note 88 below.)

<sup>21</sup> Jack T. Sanders, 'Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire: A Conversation with Rodney Stark,' *Sociological Analysis* 53.4 (1992): 442.



this world rather than on Christ.<sup>22</sup> Here, it is claimed that Jewish customs such as circumcision and Sabbath observance are no longer relevant. Although Christianity arose out of Judaism, a point we take up in our later discussions of second-century Christian identity, the latter was eventually deemed heretical because of its veneration of antiquated rites, superseded by the coming of the Messiah. These Biblical examples, of course, direct our attention to one critical component of any discussion of heresy and orthodoxy, the inherent difficulty in establishing a normative definition of the terms due to their unavoidably subjective nature.

### Available Definitions

Once relegated to the curiosities of theologians alone, recent decades have seen an influx of studies on heresy by historians of late antiquity as well as by social scientists. As might be expected, then, the present study, inasmuch as it is a substantive contribution to that ongoing discussion of heresy as a social phenomenon, is indebted to the content of such investigations. Throughout the following pages, we take it to be something of an epistemological axiom that knowledge is never *sui generis*, it is always historically and socially contingent. Such an assertion not only results from familiarity with the major findings of the sociology of knowledge, as explicated in Chapter Two, but it stems from a basic recognition of academic knowledge as a sort of contextually-bound bricolage, a structure of ideas built from the thoughts of various scholars who have come before. In this way, the understanding of heresy espoused in the following pages owes much to the thoughts of various historians, theologians, and social scientists who benefitted the field of religious studies by articulating well-reasoned definitions of heresy. Though a more traditional perspective on heresy may still be found in innumerable publications,<sup>23</sup> Bauer initiated an irreversible shift in studies on the nature of heresy that provided both impetus and momentum for social-scientific involvement in the debate. As we

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<sup>22</sup> Colossians 2:8, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984). All biblical references are taken from this translation unless otherwise noted.

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey D. Dunn, 'Heresy and Schism According to Cyprian of Carthage,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 55.2 (2004): 551-74; Hume, 166. In this example, the patristic scholar Geoffrey Dunn explores the nature of schism and heresy in early Christianity. Dunn includes Tertullian's definition of heresy, expressed as 'novelty of belief introduced later than truth' (p.554). Even the philosopher Hume defined heresy as the 'rational choice' because it was the product of an intellectual grapple with inconsistencies and therefore occurred *after* the formulation of orthodoxy.

will now show, recent definitions of heresy, whether composed by historian or theologian, possess an overtly sociological character.

### **Historians and Theologians on the Social Aspects of Heresy**

The many publications of Karen L. King concerning heresiological writings of the early church serve as fitting examples of the growing awareness of the social features of such a topic. When discussing second-century issues such as ‘Gnosticism’ or the actions of Pope Victor, for instance, King acknowledges that heresy was a constructed label for that which was potentially detrimental to Christian solidarity.<sup>24</sup> In the case of Victor, King argues that the Pope’s decision to excommunicate dissenters, though intended to preserve unity, actually served to establish competing groups through the process of schism. Instead of accepting the hackneyed notion that heresy is simply wrong belief or a deviation from truth (thus, implying that orthodoxy predates heresy), King chooses to highlight the social component of heresy as an interpretation of the discontinuous actions of peers and as a subsequent catalyst for unifying efforts. In fact, she defines heresy as ‘an assessment tool that distorts religious proximity and sameness into textual difference and social exclusion.’<sup>25</sup> Thus, the considerable similarities between the dissenters and their accusers are understated by the charge of heresy, an accusation which rhetorically functions as a social-distancing device. Expressed in this way, King’s understanding of heresy finds an appropriate home amidst sociological and anthropological concepts such as negotiations with the ‘other’ and ‘boundary maintenance’.

The blending of social theory with late antique history is perhaps best exemplified by the presidential address of Maureen Tilley to the North American Patristics Society in 2006.<sup>26</sup> Subsequently printed in the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, this insightfully contributes to the ongoing discussion which attempts to delineate schism and heresy. As a means of resolving various issues related to the problematic bifurcation between these two terms, Tilley utilises the organisational

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<sup>24</sup> Karen L. King, ‘“Social and Theological Effects of Heresiological Discourse,” *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, vol.119, eds. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 33-34.

<sup>25</sup> Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 24.

<sup>26</sup> Maureen A. Tilley, ‘When Schism Becomes Heresy in Late Antiquity: Developing Doctrinal Deviance in the Wounded Body of Christ,’ *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 15.1 (2007): 1-21.

theory of sociologist Walter Firey who proposed a system by which organisations come to experience schism.<sup>27</sup> In Firey's model, group objectives are located on a unity/identity continuum; thus, as effort is expended toward achieving group unity, less is allocated to the various methods for reinforcing group identity. In essence, Firey posits incessant flux between valorising the modes of unity and valorising the modes of identity; as groups come close to realising either goal (unity or identity), that goal becomes less meaningful because the group is being pulled so strongly toward the opposite end. Here, we should note that this vacillation between unity and identity conjures an image of flexibility or elasticity as the group is stretched in its endeavour to achieve each goal, being pulled even more aggressively the further it strays. As the present study introduces and appropriates Hans Mol's sociological theory of identity as a dialectic between adaptability and stability in the following chapters, the idea of elasticity will become increasingly important, ultimately spotlighted in our concluding chapter as a means for discussing both the degree of adaptability as well as the future success of nascent religious groups.

For now, however, it is important to highlight the way in which Tilley fruitfully applies Firey's thoughts to Cyprian and his third-century Carthaginian community. Noting that this community valued multiple goals such as church unity, individual holiness, and martyrdom, Tilley explains that the value placed on these ends by Cyprian himself, as he headed the 'rigorists' following the Decian persecution, did not always find a parallel in Rome.<sup>28</sup> Though Tilley cites several scholars who assert that Cyprian saw no distinction between heresy and schism, she clarifies the situation further by showing that schism occurred when two churches valorised the same ends differently, as, for example, when one church put forth more effort to maintain a certain degree of holiness whilst another strove for unity. Tilley suggests that both groups valued holiness and unity; however, the act of valorising those same two goals to different degrees resulted in significant tension between the two communities. When this tension occurs, Tilley claims, one observes schism rather than heresy. Viewing schism in this way then allows Tilley to construct her definition of heresy as the movement 'from simply different valorisations of the same

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Firey, 'Informal Organization and the Theory of Schism,' *American Sociological Review* 13.1 (1948): 15-24.

<sup>28</sup> Tilley, 11.

ends to valorisations of different ends.’<sup>29</sup> Therefore, heresy is almost an extreme version of schism and results from a complete change in the end goals themselves. What is more, sequentially speaking, heresy follows schism.

Though Tilley’s work serves as a helpful methodological segue, bridging the conceptual gap between theology and history on the one hand and sociology on the other, her contribution is admittedly a single representation of a larger set. It is noteworthy, for example, that the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher long ago defined ‘heterodoxy’ as the ‘inclination to keep the body of doctrine mobile and to make room for still other modes of apprehension.’<sup>30</sup> Without delving into Schleiermacher’s context and rather idiosyncratic theological agenda, we simply underline his definition of heterodoxy as one implicitly acknowledging an inherent social element in the Christian Church’s incessant efforts to define dogma in addition to suggesting a need for ‘mobility’ in that ‘body of doctrine’. In Schleiermacher’s recurring attempts to marry Christian theology to the everyday happenings of the human experience, he necessarily advances beyond dichotomising doctrine into true or false and, instead, acknowledges the role of heterodox conceptualisations in meeting the demands of Christian anxiety.

More recently, historian of Judaism Adiel Schremer took cues from the first-century Jewish community and the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. in order to adumbrate a theory specifically intended to account for the social function of heresy in a religious group’s articulation of their self-definition.<sup>31</sup> In his work, Schremer distinguishes between ‘intellectual heresy’ and ‘emotional heresy’, the former referring to a theological disagreement that does not necessarily lead to schism, and the latter referring to reflexive actions stimulated by traumatic social events (the temple destruction) that cause believers to question both their group and their God.<sup>32</sup> Emotional heresy, then, is not solely rational but is a felt ‘mood’; in response to the agonistic influence, some members of the group rush to establish new boundaries and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study* [1830] (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 76.

<sup>31</sup> Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

a new identity. As a result, those presenting Schremer's 'emotional heresy' are no longer considered insiders. In distinguishing between these two forms of heresy and centring his theoretical concepts on the social behaviours of those who choose to diverge from the existing community when facing acute opposition, Schremer effectively aligns his thoughts with social-scientific theories of deviance.<sup>33</sup>

In comparison, Lester Kurtz is an example of a social scientist applying, at least to some degree, a more traditional approach to heresy even as he borrows the language of deviance in doing so. Kurtz argues that heretics are 'deviant insiders'; *ipso facto*, heresy is a form of social deviance.<sup>34</sup> Of course, this notion is not necessarily incompatible with a sociological perspective; studies of deviance such as that by Kai Erikson mentioned in our introduction often include premises and approaches analogous to those employed in studies of heresy. Although we will argue below that heresy ultimately originates outside of the group, one need not fully abandon or deny the element of deviance in that which is deemed heretical. Furthermore, to view heresy as an aberration is also to reject the early Christian, and increasingly difficult to defend, practice of dating orthodoxy earlier than heresy. On this issue, Kurtz says, 'It is in the heat of escalating conflicts that orthodoxy is formulated, often through explicit disagreement with a position held by "heretics," sometimes at the expense, and sometimes for the benefit, of the belief system in question.'<sup>35</sup> Thus, even though our later attempt to define heresy makes little use of Kurtz's ideas, it would be unfair to suggest that he fully embraces a typical, traditional definition of heresy. Even so, he does view the heretic as one who arises from within the group but who differs in doctrine, a perspective that would certainly be supported by any of the early heresiologists who warned their audiences against 'wolves in sheep's clothing'. Kurtz's study does, however, lead us into the heart of sociology, a field with its own instructive and pertinent analyses of heresy.

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<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that Schremer's work aligns with the recent hermeneutical turn toward studies of emotion across academic disciplines. For examples related to aspects of theology and religion, see Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); John Corrigan, *Religion and Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Matthew A. Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006); and Douglas J. Davies and Nathaniel A. Warne, eds., *Emotions and Religious Dynamics* (forthcoming with Ashgate).

<sup>34</sup> Lester R. Kurtz, 'The Politics of Heresy,' *American Journal of Sociology* 88.6 (1983): 1085.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1090.

## Sociological Definitions

Some of the earliest sociological discussions of heresy, though quite brief and inchoate, come from scholars who primarily see the relationship of orthodoxy and heresy as a class conflict. For example, Friedrich Engels discusses the religious conflicts in Reformation-era Germany in terms of class oppression and opposition, naming Thomas Müntzer as a heretic for leading an uprising against feudalism.<sup>36</sup> The implication, here, is that Müntzer achieved heretical status not for his anti-Lutheran stand or his support of Anabaptist theology but because of his political position. As Hugues Portelli says, 'For Engels, heresy is the ideological expression of a rupture between a subaltern class and a ruling class.'<sup>37</sup>

As for sociologist Georg Simmel, he not only composed a substantial work on conflict, but also wrote an essay entitled 'Contribution to the Sociology of Religion' in which he explicitly mentions heresy as it relates to the social cohesion of a religious group. Essentially, Simmel recognises antecedents or precursors to 'religion' in the social activities which he calls 'religiosity'.<sup>38</sup> Human interaction necessitates the types of social experiences that, after having been abstracted and institutionalised, become religion, and that same interaction in social life results in the collective veneration of unity. It is along these lines that Simmel states,

That which arrays great masses of people in hatred and moral condemnation of heretics is certainly not the difference in the dogmatic content of teaching; in most instances, this content really is not understood at all. Rather, it is the fact of the opposition of the one against the many. The persecution of heretics and dissenters springs from the instinct for the necessity of group unity...So religion is the purest form of unity in society, raised high above all concrete individualities. This truth is demonstrated by the energy with which every heresy, no matter how irrelevant, is combated.<sup>39</sup>

In this way, Simmel defines heresy as a threat to group unity, a potential risk which causes aggressive responses from the orthodox.

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<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (Moscow: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), 42.

<sup>37</sup> Hugues Portelli, *Gramsci et la question religieuse* (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1974), 93. This quote from Jacques Berlinerblau's translation in 'Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and *Doxa*,' 336.

<sup>38</sup> Simmel, 106.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-15. This passage emphasises two crucial components of the present study: 1) That heresy is perceived as 'opposition' against orthodoxy; 2) Heresy can cause violent responses from those threatened by it.

Writing in the twenty-first century, Jacques Berlinerblau offers not only a synthesis of the early sociological definitions of heresy but an insightful and erudite contribution to the sociology of heresy. Cited in our introduction as a sociologist who sees potential for the formulation of an ideal type of heresy, Berlinerblau inches closer than others to that goal by drawing on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to reconstruct the ‘hard orthodoxy’ of early sociologists such as Engels, Gramsci, and Weber before presenting his own ‘pure’ definition of orthodoxy:

A (religious) orthodoxy (of the purest and hardest type) is a superordinate compulsory organization composed of a leading class in cahoots with other classes and social groups that (1) controls the means of material, intellectual, and symbolic production; (2) articulates ‘correct’ forms of belief and praxis through the work of rationalizing and consent-generating intellectuals; (3) identifies ‘incorrect’ forms of belief and praxis through these same intellectuals; (4) institutionally manages deviant individuals and groups through coercive mechanisms (e.g., physical and symbolic violence, excessive taxation, ostracism, etc.) or through ‘re-education,’ compromise, accommodation, and so on.<sup>40</sup>

It seems, then, that for Berlinerblau heretics are those who deviate and are subsequently ‘managed’ by the controlling, ‘superordinate’ class.

Such a notion accords well with Berlinerblau’s definition of heresy as that which arises in relation to an authoritative political apparatus capable of identifying heterodoxy and effectively managing it, a description which appears earlier in his work.<sup>41</sup> In some sense, then, heresy is an ascribed label for the minority or at least the politically disadvantaged that, either potentially or actually, represent a threat to the ruling party. This posed threat, however, is containable, and the act of managing it is simultaneously the act of identifying it as heretical. It is important to recognise that this definition of heresy implies a sense of conflict between the dominating and the dominated strata of any given society. In much the same manner as Simmel, Engels, and Kurtz, Berlinerblau recognises the undercurrents of social competition and political struggle present when ‘heresy’ is invoked and concludes his work accordingly, ‘A heretic is someone who says things that only our “enemies” say.’<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Berlinerblau, 336, 340.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>42</sup> Berlinerblau, 351.

However, Berlinerblau's relatively curt offering is deceptive, for in that brief expression one not only encounters the in-group/out-group dichotomy at the centre of much social conflict but also the dialogical or discursive aspect of heresy.

Berlinerblau's primary concern is to connect 'heretic' with 'enemy', a notion that will become increasingly important as we move forward, offering our own definition of heresy as a phenomenon identified with a sort of unalloyed opposition. For Berlinerblau, as for the present study, the heretic is a type of enemy or, at least, an antagonist who threatens to frustrate and injure. Yet, Berlinerblau chooses not to define a heretic as one who *does* what enemies do but as one who *says* what enemies say.

This subtle acknowledgement of the linguistic over the pragmatic is a recurring observation of those engaged in studies of heresy, much as it is present in the writings of heresiologists who exhort their audiences not to succumb to the teachings of false prophets. In the first paragraph of *Against Heresies*, for instance, Irenaeus states his purposes for writing such a lengthy volume.<sup>43</sup> Among the motives listed, the bishop explains his desire to refute the 'false statements' and 'impious ideas' of those who 'falsify the words of the Lord' in their 'bad interpretations' of revelation. Although Irenaeus eventually offers a number of sinful behaviours perpetrated by his opponents, his reason for refutation is simply to decry their teachings. This is especially important for Irenaeus' dealings with the 'Gnostics' for, as J.T. Nielsen notes, the 'Gnostics' essentially denied any special epistemological value to Scripture, averring that truth was transmitted solely by word of mouth.<sup>44</sup>

A familiarity with the prominence of discursive conflict in the writings of the early heresiologists led Averil Cameron to her conclusions on the relationship of heresy to orthodoxy. Orthodoxy, Cameron says, 'was asceticism, the asceticism of words and belief whose imperative was the rejection of all else.'<sup>45</sup> In this sense, the heretic was an orator, providing a voice for the expression of heresy, resulting in a war of words in which opponents employed various rhetorical strategies both to harm the discourse of the other and to buoy up the confidence of their respective followers.

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<sup>43</sup> *AH*, I, preface.1

<sup>44</sup> J.T. Nielsen, *Adam and Christ in the Theology of Irenaeus of Lyons* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1968), 47.

<sup>45</sup> Cameron, 112.



Such a struggle may have culminated in physical aggression, but it began as the verbalisation of antithetical views.

To illuminate the significance of language and dialogue for the sociology of heresy is to recognise two constituent, and often complementary, cogs in the social machinery: 1) The conscious, explicit use of language, and 2) The subconscious, inadvertent, and implicit realm of axiom. As separate planes of thought, the two work together during the articulation and identification of heresy. For example, heresiological responses to the language employed by opposing views make use of a conscious operation, the intentional engagement with the pronouncements and teachings of the perceived enemy. Likewise, the heretic (not self-defined as such) uses language to express his or her disagreements with and criticisms of the *status quo*, or, as in the two illustrative cases analysed in subsequent chapters, the heretic wields language in the form of polemic in order to stifle the rise of religious competitors. Applying similar ideas to orthodoxy, Cameron defines the latter as ‘the asceticism of words’, the conscious struggle to limit and control the expression of competing thoughts.

#### *Subconscious/Conscious*

At times, however, there appears to be a deeper level to the process, a subconscious element. In Berlinerblau’s work, he notes that both Simmel and Durkheim contribute important insights to any discussion of heresy for each theorist suggests that the players in this volley of words are unwittingly participating in an important societal cycle.<sup>46</sup> In Simmel’s comments mentioned earlier, for example, he carefully notes that the individuals involved in battles between heresy and orthodoxy believe that they are arguing over religious doctrine when, in fact, they are actually attempting to protect and maintain group solidarity. Similarly, Durkheim’s work is described as positing an underlying reality of religious life wherein adherents mistake their worship of the social group as worship of God. This is related to Durkheim’s separate assertion that criminals often only see the immediate penal ramifications of their actions but do not comprehend the important, but latent, social function of criminal behaviour. These ideas lead Berlinerblau to suggest that Simmel and

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<sup>46</sup> Berlinerblau, 344.

Durkheim view the heretic as a ‘potential catalyst for social change’ who almost inadvertently propels society forward by stretching the ‘conscience collective’.

Simmel and Durkheim, however, are not the only ones to address the unwitting and inadvertent outcomes of heresy in such contexts. Pierre Bourdieu’s well known concept of *doxa* could be defined as the axiomatically and implicitly held notion of the *status quo*. As soon as *doxa* is described, explained, or expressed verbally in any manner it no longer exists as *doxa* because it can no longer be taken for granted. Exposure to the collective consciousness raises it to a different epistemological plane where it is both explicitly and socially acknowledged.

Scholar of religion William Arnal, appreciating the utility of *doxa* for the study of heresy, applies Bourdieu’s concept to analyse the role of heresy in the construction of identity.<sup>47</sup> In his work, Arnal delineates between heresy and heterodoxy. The latter, he says, shares common ground with orthodoxy, and that common ground is understood as *doxa*. In existing as an implicitly understood notion of truth, *doxa* provides a shared paradigm in which various factions of the same general group are capable of expressing disagreement. This stability is disrupted, however, when dissenters, in their articulation of belief, unintentionally expose *doxa*. By exposing that which was implicitly and tacitly taken for granted, the heterodox transforms himself or herself into a heretic and *doxa* into orthodoxy. Thus, heterodoxy is a departure from orthodoxy just as heresy is a departure from *doxa*. However, the exposure of *doxa* initiates a paradigm shift and provides the impetus for the first explicit formulation of orthodoxy, the latter only officially articulated when it is forced to do so. That which began as a mere quibble amongst adherents with shared axioms becomes a social rupture as dissenters shift their gazes from peripheral issues to the implicitly taken-for-granted truths of the community. By framing the discussion of heresy in this way, Arnal ventures close to the sophisticated anthropological work of Roy Rappaport who intimates a hierarchy of ritual in which the two highest levels of ‘ultimate sacred postulates’ and ‘cosmological axioms’ essentially refer to implicitly shared understandings of the supernatural, relatively vague but important conceptions that often stand outside of formal expression as long

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<sup>47</sup> William E. Arnal, ‘Doxa, Heresy, and Self-Construction,’ *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, vol.119, eds. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 61.

as they can remain unchallenged.<sup>48</sup> Although Arnal's model approaches a similar topic through Bourdieu's anthropologically-based theories rather than Rappaport's, it is still intended to explain the manner by which heresy precedes the clarification of orthodoxy, threatening abstract subconscious assumptions and forcing the formal formulation of belief.

However, at the conscious level, heresy may be understood to operate somewhat differently. The more traditional understandings of heresy, in which the term is viewed as a deviation from orthodoxy, the choice to follow a competing school of thought, or the deceitful cunning of 'wolves in sheep's clothing', all stress the volition of the heretic and accept heresy as a deliberate verbalisation of dissent. Just as the subconscious or unintentional nature of heresy piqued the interest of early sociologists, so the conscious/calculated actions of heretics have also borne the burden of sociological analysis. Peter Berger, for example, appeals to the original Greek definition of heresy when he defines it as the 'picking and choosing' of an individual or group from elements of the prevailing, authoritative tradition.<sup>49</sup> The realities of religious pluralism, scientific discovery, and globalisation create an 'imperative' whereby individuals and groups are compelled to choose their beliefs from a plethora of options, even in the face of abundant and potentially contradictory information. This inescapable imperative obviates the need for an 'orthodoxy' for, in Berger's view, those individuals comprising the orthodox of any religion attempt to convince themselves that they have surrendered to fate when, in actuality, they are quite cognisant of the choices that led them there.<sup>50</sup> For Berger, then, intentional choice is one hallmark of heresy.

### *Rhetoric, Equivocation and Confusion*

Yet, in examining the conscious/subconscious or intentional/unintentional duality linked to the concept of heresy, we now find it difficult to ignore the potential for rhetoric and confusion inherent in heresiological discourse. After all, rhetoric is

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<sup>48</sup> Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 263-71.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (London: Collins, 1980), 28.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

the deliberate management of poignant words in the service of religious agenda to the same degree that confusion is the unintended consequence of religious competitors' inability to recognise doctrinal debate as a veil for social conflicts regarding solidarity and marginalisation. For this reason, George Zito authored an insightful sociological investigation into the discursive element of heresy, in which he notes, 'Heresy is first of all a language phenomenon: it exists only in discourse, whatever its social derivatives.'<sup>51</sup> Zito then defines discourse as 'any collective activity that orders its concerns through language' and applies the thoughts of postmodern theorists, such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, to argue that heresy is 'an attack...upon an institutionalised way of speaking about the world.'<sup>52</sup> Much like the ongoing issue over the difference between schism and heresy, a distinction is made here between heresy and apostasy by claiming that heresy threatens to use accepted orthodox terminology to say and mean something different; apostasy makes use of another discourse/language altogether. With that distinction in mind, it is important to note that the institutionalised manner of speaking is threatened because the heretic's proclamations reveal that the same language can have an entirely different meaning, or worse yet, the pre-existing discourse can remain unchanged whilst justifying a new set of behaviours, a realisation that often leads to cognitive dissonance among the orthodox adherents who are now confounded by the sense of equivocation.<sup>53</sup> Zito rightly notes that this confusion is at the heart of the violent responses often exhibited by those threatened.

Such cogent thoughts have already served subsequent sociologists like Malcolm Bull who applied the theory to his study of Seventh-Day Adventists.<sup>54</sup> Bull draws a parallel between Zito's classifications of heresy and apostasy and the categories of sect and cult. The Seventh-day Adventists are, Bull argues, heretics (and, thus, a sect) because they define themselves in opposition to American civil religion. Bull's observations are important for the present study because he mentions

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<sup>51</sup> George Zito, 'Toward a Sociology of Heresy,' *Sociological Analysis* 44.2 (1983): 129.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-5.

<sup>53</sup> We will discuss 'cognitive dissonance' and its roots in psychology in more depth during our discussion of the heretical process in Chapter Two.

<sup>54</sup> Malcolm Bull, 'The Seventh-Day Adventists: Heretics of American Civil Religion,' *Sociological Analysis* 50.2 (1989): 177-87.

that the opposition expressed by ‘heretical’ sects can be either implicit (Seventh-day Adventists) or explicit (early Latter-day Saints).<sup>55</sup> Indeed, as the following pages turn more directly toward early Mormonism, this explicit social opposition will be of central significance.

In addition to benefitting the work of other sociologists, Zito’s theory stands alone as a helpful synthesis of a number of the aforementioned concepts concerning the sociology of heresy. Much like Engels or Berlinerblau, Zito asserts that heresy requires a ‘prevailing orthodoxy’ against which the heretics struggle. Echoing Simmel, Zito mentions the aggressive responses of the orthodox believers who perceive the heresy as a group threat and act reflexively. Furthermore, Zito’s emphasis on what he calls ‘the semiotic phenomenon’, which he admits is primarily a ‘semantic phenomenon’, raises the important point of equivocation and its role in causing confusion and mental unrest. When the institutionalised meanings of words are challenged, the orthodox encounter the same terms employed differently, a phenomenon which is crucial not only for Zito’s definition of heresy but, it could be argued, also for Tilley and Arnal’s.

In slight contrast to Tilley and Arnal, however, Zito dedicates no space to discussing the relativity or subjectivity of the designation of a discourse as ‘heretical’. Though Tilley is bound by a historical record which comes to her through the voices of the majority, she does not simply reconstruct a scenario in which a large, authoritative body exists prior to the deviation of a smaller group with the former deeming the latter ‘heretical’. Instead, Tilley argues that these competing views moved from schism to heresy when they came to seek different ends and group values altogether, heresy is almost understood as the impasse itself. Her concern, of course, is not so much with the orthodoxy/heresy dichotomy as with the ‘schism/heresy’ dichotomy, but there may be some justification for arguing that Tilley accepts the inherent relativity of heresy as a term invoked by those on either side of the chasm of values even if she does not explicitly address the issue. In contrast, Arnal’s thoughts on the relative nature of heresy are a bit clearer. He challenges the traditionally-held notion of the sequence wherein orthodoxy precedes heresy, asserting that orthodoxy only comes to exist when *doxa* is exposed. Thus the heretic is the one responsible for unveiling that which was formerly taken for granted whether or not such an individual

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 185.

is aligned with the majority or some minority. For Arnal, then, 'heretic' is used more as a sociological classification than as a pejorative label.

This differs significantly from Zito who states, 'To be creditable, a heresy always appeals to those same values that enabled *the prevailing orthodoxy* to maintain its monopoly, extending these to itself (emphasis added).'<sup>56</sup> As mentioned above, Zito explicitly asserts that heresy is defined as such in relation to an already established orthodoxy. Indeed, Zito's model necessitates an orthodoxy capable of identifying the cause of the cognitive dissonance experienced in the group. Most of the definitions offered above share similar shortcomings, relying on an obvious political majority or normative discourse to serve as the orthodoxy in opposition to which heresy appears. There is little recognition of the fact that heresy is ultimately, necessarily synonymous with 'the other' and, therefore, is frequently only imbued with meaning when applied to outsiders by insiders. As Cameron says, 'To describe oneself as a heretic is in essence a logical contradiction.'<sup>57</sup> It seems, then, that our sociological view of heresy must account for this relativity whereby religious groups facing opposition come to describe that opposition in terms of heresy and their own identity in terms of orthodoxy, a fully subjective, but perhaps sociologically expected, behaviour intended to safeguard identity in the face of danger. Therefore, at this point in our study issues of internal politics combine with the rhetorical energy of the language of heresy and orthodoxy to illuminate the inescapable biases driving religious truth claims.

### **Relativity and Heresy**

In his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, philosopher John Locke presents an argument concerning the relationship of religion to government. In noting the importance of religious toleration for minimising civil unrest, he comments on the laborious task of identifying one true religion. It is in this context that Locke laments the unfortunate abuse suffered by some Christians at the hands of their fellow believers, stating that the claim of one group to have authority over the other is 'great and specious'. This opinion, he notes, is supported by the fact that 'every Church is

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<sup>56</sup> Zito, 126.

<sup>57</sup> Cameron, 107.

orthodox to it self[sic]; to others, Erroneous or Heretical.’<sup>58</sup> This assertion echoes the thoughts of philosopher Blaise Pascal who bemoaned the lack of a universal sense of justice in his *Pensées*, remarking, ‘Truth lies on this side of the Pyrenees, error on the other.’<sup>59</sup> Likewise, Hume said that monotheism in general necessitated an exclusive mindset as every monotheistic movement necessarily maintains the absolute truth of their own beliefs, over and against the doctrines of others.<sup>60</sup> Each of these quotations suggests that philosophers have long recognised the unequivocal bias in the distinction of truth versus falsehood.

The postmodern era, of course, effectively lifted notions of relativity to the fore, making it somewhat imperative that we acknowledge the apparent biases as well as the undeniable subjectivity lying beneath scholarly endeavours. In studying heresy, it is crucial that one concede the inherent ambiguity in the object of scrutiny; heresy, for the heretic, is orthodoxy. As a third party, however, the scholar of religion is fortunate enough to avoid the quagmire of truth/falsehood disputes located in theological discussions of heresy and orthodoxy. As Berlinerblau notes, orthodoxy is not the expression of some immutable truth but is the articulation of perspective in relation to heresy.<sup>61</sup> In other words, there is a relational contingency between orthodoxy and heterodoxy; existing as two opposed forms of knowledge, each needs the other in order to sustain meaning. Though this recognition marks a distinct turn from the heresiologies composed by devout religious adherents of the past, it is true to the basic premises of sociological inquiry wherein opposed social units each construct identity in relation to their opponents. In the same way, we can claim that orthodoxy is essentially the process of ‘constructing an inversion of the heretical other’, subtly underlining the role that perspective plays in the enterprise of heresy hunting.<sup>62</sup> This calls to mind anthropologist Marshall Sahlins’ observation concerning more

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<sup>58</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Boston, 1743), 24-25, Gale, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, available from, <http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=duruni&tabID=T001&docId=CB3326639271&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>, accessed 20 January 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>60</sup> Hume, 161.

<sup>61</sup> Berlinerblau, 332.

<sup>62</sup> Henderson, 2.

‘primitive’ cultures: those viewed as ‘marginal to history and modernity’ are ‘marginal in nobody’s eyes but our own.’<sup>63</sup> In the eyes of the ‘marginal’, it is modernity that is ‘peripheral’. Perhaps perspective, then, is the *sine qua non* of accusation, an important point for our later survey of the social antagonism exhibited toward second-century Christians as well as toward early Mormons.

For now, it is critical to note that the intrinsic relativity of heresy indirectly challenges the theories of early sociologists mentioned above. Individuals such as Gramsci, Marx, Engels, and Weber offered few explicit statements on heresy, but the relevant content that does exist suggests that heresy, for them, was little more than class conflict and, accordingly, the orthodox were understood to be the powerful majority. In cases where it is ceded that political authority is not necessarily possessed by a majority, these theorists still prefer to view the heretics as underprivileged or of lower socio-economic status. Upon recognising the relative, subjective nature of heresy, however, one discovers historical examples of politically powerful majorities promulgating what the subordinate minorities deem heretical. For example, the Quakers who arrived in the Massachusetts Bay during the seventeenth century were quickly ostracised and persecuted by the ruling Puritans of Boston. The Puritans viewed these Quaker missionaries as heretics and set out to eradicate them from the colony. At the same time, however, the Quakers received a great deal of their identity from this conflict and also began to view the Puritans of the area (the political majority) as representatives of heresy.<sup>64</sup> From an analytical perspective, both religious movements felt compelled to label the other, not because of doctrinal dissention nor because of political subversion but more basically due to actual, physical opposition and the potential injury to group identity.

### **Heresy and the Negotiation of Identity**

This, as will now be apparent, provides one of the basic contentions of the present study. Heresy, in its most basic, social sense, consists in opposition from any or all directions against the solidarity, identity, and the existing worldview of a collective. While more will be said later, it is worth making clear at this stage that

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<sup>63</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 9-10.

<sup>64</sup> Erikson, 107-36.



early Mormonism expressly exhibits this dynamic. The seminal event of early Mormonism, Joseph Smith's First Vision, finds young Joseph asking the Father and Son which Christian denomination is correct. In response, one of the theophanic 'personages' tells Joseph that all sects are 'wrong'.<sup>65</sup> This event, when combined with the numerous accounts of apostasy found in both The Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, resulted in the distinctly Mormon belief in a 'Great Apostasy' of the early Christian church. Coincidentally, while the early Latter-day Saints were constructing their views on the falsehood of Christianity, various Protestants within the immediate environment argued that Mormons themselves propagated fraudulent fabrications. One notable example is that of Peter Bauder. After interviewing Joseph Smith in 1830, the inaugural year of the Latter-day Saints' Church and of their Book of Mormon, Bauder published the following conclusion:

... Among these imposters there has one arisen by the name of Joseph Smith, Jr. who commenced his system of church government in this state, (New York) in the year 1830. His followers are commonly called Mormonites, sometimes New Jerusalemites, or Golden Bible society; they call themselves the true followers of Christ. I conceive it my duty to expose this diabolical system for two special reasons—first, because I have had an opportunity with Smith, in his first setting out, to discover his plan; secondly, because I learn since they were broke up in New York State, they have gone to the western States, and are deceiving themselves and the people, and are increasing very fast.<sup>66</sup>

Later, Bauder referred to Smith's 'translated' Book of Mormon as both a 'horrid blasphemy' and a 'diabolical invention'. For the first 15 years or so of Mormon history, analogous examples abound as outsiders sought to define the new religious movement. The opposition exhibited by such non-Mormon observers, even in their pejorative use of 'Mormonites' for those following Joseph Smith, is the basic subject of later chapters; however, these polemical and ideological conflicts highlight the difficulty in distinguishing the orthodox from the heterodox among competing forms

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<sup>65</sup> PGP, *Joseph Smith-History* 1:19. The church-sanctioned version of this account is referenced in order to avoid unnecessary conflict or confusion. While LDS authorities (and the author) acknowledge the various permutations of this story in the early years of the religious movement, it is this canonised version which now holds authority for members of the Mormon Church (see notes 144 and 145 of Chapter Three). For further details on the history of the account, see Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971).

<sup>66</sup> Peter Bauder, *The Kingdom and Gospel of Jesus Christ: Contrasted with That of Anti-Christ. A Brief Review of Some of the Most Interesting Circumstances, Which Have Transpired Since the Institution of the Gospel of Christ, from the Days of the Apostles* (Canajoharie: A. H. Calhoun, 1834), 36.

of religiosity. From the perspective of both the early Mormons and the various Protestants with whom they coexisted, the other represented heresy.

It is not surprising that similar social tensions occurred in early Christian history. By the beginning of the second century, for example, Jews, Christians, and Pagans began to emerge as distinct social groups. Although events such as the destruction of the Jewish temple during the first century had caused a great deal of enmity between Jews and Roman society, as Philippa Townsend highlights, a certain faction of those Jews began to view themselves as part of a separate movement known as Christianity just as the second century dawned.<sup>67</sup> In turn, this new movement was seen as heretical by the Jews who were, by now, shifting their focus from Romans to Christians. We recognise the relevance of this example when we highlight the effort exerted by Christians like Justin Martyr in refuting Jewish teachings. Once again, the heresy label was tossed to and fro, serving less as an absolute measure of truth and more as a mechanism for negotiating with competing social groups. For both the second-century Christians and the early Mormons, social threats were perceived by insiders *and* outsiders, an impasse of perspective that incited those encountering religious opposition to call their opponents heretics. In our third and fourth chapters, we explore these social tensions in more depth, elucidating both the particular forms of opposition faced by the new religious movements as well as the counter-narratives articulated as a means of resolving conflict. Before we can proceed with such an analysis, however, we must first outline our understanding of heresy as an ideal type of opposition.

### **The Ideal Type**

As a topic of sociological scrutiny, heresy sheds light on the nature of social opposition by pointing beyond the conflict itself to the dialectical processes involved. As William Arnal notes, ‘heresy requires an orthodoxy.’<sup>68</sup> Conversely, in his insightful article on the matter, Kurtz says that heresy benefits orthodoxy because, ‘Beliefs are most clearly and systematically articulated when they are formed *via negativa*.’<sup>69</sup> The two exist in a binary relationship that, in most contexts, relates to the

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<sup>67</sup> Schremer, 24; Townsend, 212.

<sup>68</sup> Arnal, 50.

<sup>69</sup> Kurtz, 1085.

polarity of their respective truth-claims, perhaps one of the most basic and unalloyed forms of opposition available for analysis. As we have already demonstrated, in this ideological tug-of-war, the categories of heresy and orthodoxy are necessarily relative. For instance, some scholars believe that second-century dissenters such as Valentinus were actually seeking Christian reform in order to achieve doctrinal standardization.<sup>70</sup> From Valentinus' perspective, opponents such as Irenaeus were resisting the process of developing and establishing orthodoxy. This charge, of course, differs little from that made against the Valentinians by Irenaeus himself.

Thus, as multiple groups struggle to combat the assertions of the others, encounters with heresy inevitably result in a more profound delineation between the in-group and the out-group. As one collective becomes increasingly marginalized, those of the less marginalized gain confidence and increase in identity through the regulation of their own beliefs. Self-definition does not, of course, occur instantaneously. The process, however, is initiated by the perceived threat of false teachings or, perhaps most importantly, the threat of misrepresentation. It is in this sense that Irenaeus refers to his Gnostic opponents as wolves in sheep's clothing, 'those who are now promulgating heresy'.<sup>71</sup> Here, Irenaeus' fear is not only that Christians might be led away from the Western church and its true teaching but also that the heretics may be easily mistaken for orthodox believers, a sort of stretching of the boundaries to accommodate multiple outlooks. For Irenaeus, this type of accommodation could dilute Christian identity, depleting it of its distinctiveness among various sects and superstitions emerging in the empire.

The degree of rhetorical command and cogency inscribed in the works of Irenaeus and other heresiologists, however, is of little benefit to the modern scholar of religion. This is because a certain utility of heresy comes when, as a religious concept, it is removed from its theological moorings and allowed to function as a sociological instrument. Max Weber offered the study of religion a useful analytical

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<sup>70</sup> Einar Thomassen, 'Orthodoxy and Heresy in Second-Century Rome,' *HTR* 97.3 (2004): 241-56.

<sup>71</sup> *AH*, I.Preface.2. This is taken from Matthew 7:15, 'Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.' The imagery of wily wolves hoodwinking the credulous by wearing the pelts of sheep has been used throughout the history of Christianity by those hoping to reassert their legitimacy while stemming the success of their opponents. This is particularly the case during the Second Great Awakening in nineteenth-century America when multiple sects and religious movements arose from the spiritual fervour of the time. Both early Mormons and Ann Lee's Shakers repeatedly utilised such language when speaking of outsiders, and we revisit this theme in the next chapter.

concept he called the ideal type, an intellectual construct ‘formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.’<sup>72</sup> In essence, ideal types function as the measuring sticks for sociological concepts in general and religious phenomena in particular, ensuring that discursive study of concrete, observable data is possible by postulating an ideal sample against which future observed samples may be compared and contrasted. However, as Bruun correctly highlights, Weber explicitly defined ideal types as abstract constructions admittedly tied to the historical setting of the scholar as well as the context of the phenomena studied.<sup>73</sup> Ideal types are, in this way, never to be found in reality for they simply exist as an idealised aggregate of observed data.

### **A Working Definition**

For the present study, therefore, we define heresy as an ideal type of externally-sourced opposition against the beliefs, personal wellness (physical and psychological health), and unity of a religious group and its members, often demanding both explanation and subsequent theological renovation by those within the group. The collective’s response to such heresy is not so much an articulation of belief or truth as it is a negotiation with their cultural context, an effort to establish a fortified meaning system. Heresy, as opposition, threatens to stretch that system unto breaking by directly challenging both beliefs and group solidarity. In doing so, however, heresy engenders further group development and creates new social dynamics as well as novel theological beliefs. The threat of heresy may be perceived by the majority group to be a matter of doctrinal deviance, but Simmel correctly notes that it is more precisely a threat against unity.<sup>74</sup> But where does this threat originate?

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<sup>72</sup> Max Weber, ‘Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy,’ *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, eds. E. A. Shils and H.A. Finch (New York: Free Press, 1949), 90.

<sup>73</sup> H.H. Bruun, ‘Weber on Rickert: From Value Relation to Ideal Type,’ *Max Weber Studies* 1.2(2001): 155-6.

<sup>74</sup> Simmel, 114.

### Whence comes the Heresy (Exogenous or Endogenous)?

In viewing heresy as an ideal type of opposition, we implicitly reject the aforementioned notion that the heretic is simply a ‘deviant insider’. In fact, even the early Christian heresiologists acknowledged that the ultimate source of heresy was external. King notes that these authors often exerted great effort ‘alleging that heresy is produced by outside contamination of an originally pure faith.’<sup>75</sup> One of the most popular scapegoats in this regard was Simon Magus, assumed to be the figure from Acts 8. Within the Christian tradition, Simon Magus increasingly came to be recognised as the father of all heresy due, in great part, to the influence of Irenaeus’ work, *Against Heresies*, in which Simon is identified as the forefather of all heretical sects. In fact, Irenaeus attempted to reconstruct a sort of heretical lineage by which Simon’s teachings led to ‘all the heresies’.<sup>76</sup> This juxtaposition of the heretical lineage with the apostolic lineage of the Church rhetorically suggested that the ‘Gnostics’ not only stood outside of orthodoxy but actually belonged to a certain heritage in their own right, in bad company but company nonetheless. We should note that Mormon scriptures repeatedly speak of lineages as well. Whether it is the cursed descendants of Canaan in Moses 7:8, references to Adam’s seed, Abraham’s seed, or Lehi’s seed, or discussions of Lamanites versus Nephites, Mormonism expresses much of its theology and anthropology in terms of ancestry.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the incessant struggle recounted by the Book of Mormon between the Lamanites and the Nephites is one key example of how opposition comes to be understood as something deeper than competing ideologies. In fact, Chapter Four illuminates the interplay of theological narrative, nineteenth-century social pressures, and religious identity as Joseph Smith posited a spiritual dualism in which opposition was understood as the consequence of Lucifer’s primordial determination to act against humanity.

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<sup>75</sup> King, ‘Social and Theological Effects of Heresiological Discourse,’ 31.

<sup>76</sup> *AH*, I.23.2.

<sup>77</sup> Armand Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 5-7. The interface of Mormon identity, race relations, and the notion of multiple lineages is the basic topic of Armand Mauss’ book. Much as we will suggest in Chapter Four and elsewhere, Mauss points to the importance of the *construction* of ancestry over uncovering historical realities. Evidence that the Saints have retained a focus on ancestry, of course, can be found in their admirable dedication to preserving and compiling family records (and record keeping in general) in addition to their perpetuation of a theological narrative.

The postulation of such lineages implies that heresy possesses a monolithic quality capable of being traced back through generations, a suggestion which gives rise to the important distinction between heretic and heresy. The former may in fact appear as an insider but, inasmuch as he or she is a messenger, that insider may simply relay an outside message. In some sense, then, as we continue to explore the social aspects of religious opposition and cultivate a sociologically-informed view of heresy, our chief concern is with the external source of antagonism rather than with its (potentially) internal representative. With this in mind, one might single out Max Weber as an early figure who recognised the exogenous nature of heresy. In describing the religious landscape of China, for instance, Weber categorised Confucianism as orthodox whilst labelling Taoism and Buddhism as heretical due to the outsider status of the latter two traditions.<sup>78</sup> Berlinerblau rightly notices that, in doing so, Weber challenged the common view of heretics as ‘deviant insiders’.<sup>79</sup>

Historian John Henderson similarly points to Irenaeus’ discussion of Marcion as an example of the external origins of heresy.<sup>80</sup> In *Against Heresies* I.27, Irenaeus says that Marcion was the successor of Simon, spoke ‘with the mouth of the devil’, and promulgated ‘the bitter and malignant poison of the serpent, the great author of apostasy.’ Henderson mentions this portion of Irenaeus’ writings as an instance in which a heresiologist claims both Simon and the Devil as the ultimate sources of heresy.<sup>81</sup> Again, the heretical teachings find their origins from outside of the religious group. Marcion was a deviant to be sure, he undoubtedly utilised the idiomatic language of Christians in his day, challenged certain beliefs, and reformulated others, but in the end he represented external opposition. His was the most fundamental of all agonistic voicings, the very words of Satan.

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<sup>78</sup> Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 177-99.

<sup>79</sup> Berlinerblau, 337.

<sup>80</sup> Henderson, 135.

<sup>81</sup> One should recognise that Irenaeus was not alone. Approximately fifty years later, Cyprian of Carthage explicitly described heresy as the surreptitious deceit of ‘the incautious’ by the ‘enemy’ who was ‘cast down by the advent of Christ.’ Cyprian, *The Treatises of Cyprian*, Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century, vol. 5, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1887), I.3

In *The Origins of Satan*, historian Elaine Pagels traces the history of Satan as the quintessence of oppositional power as perceived in the minds of Christians. In her introduction, Pagels observes that Christians have always tended to demonise their opponents, drawing on the Gospels for a dramatic framework in which believers are identified as disciples and their opponents (Jews, pagans, and heretics) as Satan or his minions.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps the most pertinent passage in this regard comes from John's Gospel in which Christ speaks to his Jewish audience:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, the Christian tradition has always propagated this sort of satanic legend which itself conflates the 'deviant insider' with the threatening outsider by speaking of Lucifer as a beautiful angel who, as a consequence of pride and envy, is cast *out* of heaven; he is not only the embodiment of evil but of the conspicuous potency of *exogenous* enemies. It is for this reason that sociologists like Durkheim and Berger can separately observe a sociological role for the devil; the former claiming that 'Satan is an essential piece of the Christian system' wherein society's dualistic elements (good and evil) are reflected,<sup>84</sup> and the latter noting that the devil is 'the oldest antagonist of the sacred'.<sup>85</sup>

Historian Randall Stephens and his colleague, physicist Karl Giberson, point out that conservative evangelical Christians in America still tend to 'demonise' their opponents, offering examples such as the history book written by Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*, in which America's history is laid out in such a manner as to highlight supposed spiritual battles. In this timeline, 'Satan, always in opposition, won his fair share of battles, too, but God triumphed overall.'<sup>86</sup> Later in the volume, Stephens and Giberson note that evangelical leaders believe

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<sup>82</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1996), Introduction, xviii.

<sup>83</sup> John 8:44

<sup>84</sup> Durkheim, 467.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (Middlesex: Penguin University Books, 1973), 48.

<sup>86</sup> Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson, *The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2011), 76.

themselves to be incessantly engaged in a supernatural war with Satan. Opposition to conservative evangelical agendas, such as the effort to teach Creationism rather than Evolution in schools or the desire to propagate that America was founded by like-minded Christians, is interpreted as the clever work of the devil. Stephens and Giberson offer a succinct and astute conclusion: ‘Easy, natural invocations of Satan are rhetorically powerful.’<sup>87</sup>

As we briefly mentioned above, Satan was understood to be the root of agonism for early Mormons as well. Not only is it his superciliousness that results in his expulsion from heaven with a third of the angels, but it is he who tempts the ‘children of men’ on earth.<sup>88</sup> In the early years of the LDS Church, God’s revelations, channelled through the prophet Joseph Smith, frequently addressed and redressed issues faced by members in the course of their everyday lives. If objectives were frustrated or otherwise inhibited, hope could come in the form of a revelation. Thus, in 1831, Joseph Smith became convinced that the land of Missouri held sacred value. Offering his followers numerous revelations on this land of Zion and the community which they should build there, Smith often described Satan as the force behind the thwarting of these plans. The Missourians were not keen to hand over the land and, in response, Smith presented his group with these words, ‘Wherefore I the Lord willeth, that you should purchase the lands, that you may have advantage of the world, that you may have claim on the world, that they may not be stirred up unto anger: For satan putteth it into their hearts to anger against you...’<sup>89</sup> Those who might resist the efforts of the Saints, in other words, simply did so under the influence of the devil. This sentiment was preserved in the words of a hymn chosen by Joseph Smith’s wife Emma Smith for inclusion in a bound collection:

1. There is a land the Lord will bless,  
Where all the saints shall come;  
There is a day for righteousness,  
When Israel gathers home.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>88</sup> Book of Commandments 29:45-46. For historical exactitude, our study references the earliest available editions of Book of Mormon quotations as well as revelations from the 1833 Book of Commandments and 1835 edition of Doctrine and Covenants whenever possible. When cited hereafter, these texts are listed as: BOM1830, BOM1837, BOM1840, BOC, and D&C1835. All are taken from Mormon Studies CD-ROM (Smith Research Associates, 1998).

<sup>89</sup> BOC 64:28-29.



2. Before the word goes forth--Destroy!  
And all the wicked burn,  
With songs of everlasting joy,  
The pure-in-heart return.

3. Their fields along Missouri's flood,  
Are in perspective seen,  
As unto Israel "Canaan stood,  
While Jordan flow'd between."

4. Though wicked men and satan strive,  
To keep them from that land,  
And from their homes the saints they drive,  
To try the Lord's command...<sup>90</sup>

Whether located in the impassioned poetry of the early Mormons or the polemical writings of Irenaeus, there is a recurring sequence which emerges from the observations noted above whereby religious believers who are facing opposition initially blame an individual and/or the school of thought associated with that individual before attempting to trace the historical antecedents of the heresy. After uncovering any such historical lineage, heresiologists like Irenaeus seem to shift the blame to an ultimate supernatural source. This trend calls to mind the thoughts of Hume mentioned earlier. Noting the proliferation of polytheism among the earliest human civilisations, Hume proposed that individuals tend to postulate a multitude of divines when attempting to explain the various conflicts of nature. For example, the frost that destroyed crops was not simply understood as opposition from the malevolent forces of nature against man but, instead, those freezing temperatures were viewed as a window into the supernatural realm in which the god of winter laboured against the god of the harvest.

A similar pattern has also been recognised by various anthropologists. One informative example may be drawn from Godfrey Lienhardt's study of the religion of the *Dinka* tribe in Africa. He concluded that the tribe's various religious rites were intended to maintain tension with the divine, an agonistic relationship perceived as existing between the human members of the group and God.<sup>91</sup> When the *Dinka*

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<sup>90</sup> Emma Smith, *A Collection of Sacred Hymns* (F.G. Williams & Co., 1835), 45.

<sup>91</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 37.

experienced opposition or ambiguities, the term *nhialic* ('Divinity') was evoked, thus confounding experiences were effectively integrated into an adaptable belief system by always attributing the former to *nhialic*.<sup>92</sup> In this way, though Lienhardt did not observe the *Dinka* engaging in a blaming game like that of Irenaeus, they did trace everyday afflictions such as physical illness back to an ultimate spiritual tension between God and humanity. Accordingly, Lienhardt's colleague Evans-Pritchard acknowledged a related phenomenon among the *Nuer* of the Sudan. This process wherein attention is gradually focused 'upward' toward the spiritual was most noticeable in *Nuer* responses to foreign influence. As the cultural impact of the Western world made its way into Africa, the *Nuer* were faced with the novel experience of responding to such an imposition. They found themselves confronting a cultural clash with the inevitable dilemma of whether to assimilate to, or outright reject, the encroaching force. The unfamiliarity of this dilemma resulted in an oppressive desire for explanation as the group turned to their existing meaning system to answer new questions. Fortunately, the concept of 'spirit' which had developed among the group allowed for what Evans-Pritchard referred to as 'refraction without limits.'<sup>93</sup> Much in the way that the *Dinka* used *nhialic* to explain multitudinous existential quandaries, the *Nuer* were able to maintain a sufficiently broad understanding of 'spirit' in order to evoke the term whenever exigent, exogenous circumstances upset social stability. Both the *Dinka* and the *Nuer* not only serve as examples of social groups positing external, and supernatural, origins for opposition but they highlight the importance of adaptability for religious systems of meaning, providing concepts and categories capable of explaining unfamiliar experiences. As heresy presses in on the group, and as we will revisit in our concluding chapter, a degree of flexibility in the belief system goes a long way toward ensuring stable identity and future longevity for the community.

#### *The Exogenous Threat: The Power to Penetrate Boundaries*

In our view, heresy seems an apt descriptor of this phenomenon in which religious opposition is experienced and divine sources are proposed as the culpable

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>93</sup> E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 310.

entities. It is important to remember, however, that in this discussion there is an unavoidable discrepancy between what the religious insider perceives and what the religious scholar observes. For members of many religious groups, it is not only natural but quite plausible to shift the focus from deviant to divine because of an *a priori* belief in supernatural dualism, a worldview that proffers a malevolent deity on which one may place such blame. However, the scholar of religion does not benefit from such a position and, consequently, is often compelled to view this sort of sacralising process as one half of a larger, cyclical formula. Just as humans turn their collective gaze from shared experience to posited, divine conflict, so their constructed myths and soteriological narratives act in reverse, justifying and explaining earthly opposition in terms of cosmological clashes. This is precisely the sort of self-fulfilling prophecy described by Simmel:

In those social relations the coloring that we call religious, on account of its analogy with existing religiosity, comes into being spontaneously, as a purely social psychological constellation, one of the possible forms of conduct between person and person. By contrast, religion conceived as an independent phenomenon is a derivative thing...When this separation and materialisation of religion has been accomplished, religion in turn reflects on the immediate psychic relations among people, giving them the now recognized coloring of so-called religiosity. In doing so, however, it merely gives back what it received originally.<sup>94</sup>

In this discussion of the sociological genesis of religion, Simmel highlights the dialectical, or reciprocal, nature of the development; originally born of human interaction, religiosity comes to engender beliefs in the divine. In turn, of course, these beliefs are used as an interpretation of reality, effective for deriving meaning out of negative experiences.

Drawing on Simmel's ideas, and anticipating Chapter Two in which we explicate the helpful contributions of the sociology of knowledge to the present analysis of heresy, perhaps it is worthwhile to discuss other projectionists of the early twentieth century, keeping in mind that social heresy is often manifested as external opposition. Resembling Simmel's thoughts in many ways, Durkheim, for example, says that 'society is the soul of religion' and the sacred is an idealised form of reality.<sup>95</sup> In Durkheim's view, group sentiments, arising from social life, come to be

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<sup>94</sup> Simmel, 106-07.

<sup>95</sup> Durkheim, 468-72.

expressed as religious concepts and, thus, the various evils and virtues of society find representation in the consequent belief systems. For Durkheim, as for Simmel, ‘The collective ideal which religion expresses is far from being due to a vague innate power of the individual, but it is rather at the school of collective life that the individual has learned to idealize.’<sup>96</sup>

Of course, it would be remiss of us to discuss projectionist notions without mentioning the psychologist Sigmund Freud who promulgated a psychoanalytic concept of projection whereby individuals turn their internal conflicts, struggles, and negative emotions to some person or persons. In this way, he suggested, the afflicted individual creates an enemy, the personification of embodiment of psychological troubles. In *The Future of an Illusion*, however, Freud applied the concept of projection directly to the religious proclivities of humans, suggesting that individuals initially construct divinities out of the need to better relate with the oppressive powers of nature.<sup>97</sup> Just as Durkheim believed that all evil experiences in society find representation in religion, so Freud asserted that the ‘gods’ made by humanity ‘must compensate [humans] for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them.’<sup>98</sup> Among Freud’s thoughts on religion, we find a particularly significant observation – namely, that the projection of social hardships onto sacred ideals results in religious beliefs concerned with the righting of wrongs, the ‘obliteration’ of death which ‘brings us all the perfection that we may perhaps have missed here.’<sup>99</sup> In other words, in so much as religion reflects and addresses itself to the collective experiences of opposition, it attempts resolution by postulating a deeper level of meaning, what Douglas Davies calls ‘super-plausibility’, an idea to which we return in Chapter Four.<sup>100</sup> Here, it is more important to recognise that the deeper sense of meaning provides a path to individual perfection, a crucial point for

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>97</sup> Freud, 13.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>100</sup> Douglas Davies, *Anthropology & Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 152. Davies takes up the issue of plausibility, presented in detail by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, and offers ‘super-plausibility’ as a description of the paradigm shift which occurs when a group or individual comes to believe in a transcendent, underlying realm of truth that supersedes what was previously thought plausible.

our later exploration of deification as a type of soteriology capable of conferring identity on believers who have experienced intense social heresy.

Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann also instructively expound projectionist ideas in their seminal work, *The Social Construction of Reality*. This work is discussed in much more depth in the following chapter, but it is important to note now that Berger and Luckmann contribute very important concepts to our discussion, such as an elucidation of ‘paramount reality’.<sup>101</sup> First articulated by Alfred Schutz in his engagement with the work of Husserl and the latter’s notion of ‘life-world’ (*Lebenswelt*), paramount reality essentially designates the reality of everyday life, the conscious realm within which all individuals spend most of their time. As a sort of cognitive territory circumscribing, but lending meaning to, every individual’s unique perspective on reality, paramount reality is taken-for-granted and its explanatory value is only found wanting when some occurrence contradicts this reality. Similar to Arnal’s ideas on the heretic as one exposing the taken-for-granted *doxa*, paramount reality can become threatened in a sense by unfamiliar experiences, events that betray the inadequacies of the individual’s perception of ‘the way things are’. Once again, religion is seen as having its roots in society as some human interactions and natural events lead to unexplainable infringements on the existing barrier erected around the interpretations of reality that have received incessant reinforcement from all members of society as they go about their daily lives. Confounding phenomena born of social relations are then explained supernaturally, as violations of paramount reality.

Berger and Luckmann, then, not only add to the body of theoretical knowledge concerned with religion as a social product but also illuminate the nearly inevitable breach of social, and even cognitive, boundaries resulting from opposition against a social group and its members. Though each of the theorists cited above identify opposition differently, insinuating everything from natural disasters to economic poverty, there is a general acknowledgement of both the outside status of opposition as well as its potential to stimulate supernatural thoughts in the minds of those afflicted. In the introduction to the present study, we highlighted the fact that heresy originally denoted a choice, coming to refer to one’s choice between various schools

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<sup>101</sup> Peterg Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 35.

of thought before acquiring the more provocative connotation of a fallacious doctrinal alternative. Thus, Irenaeus' protégé Hippolytus believed that the source of early heresy was Greek philosophy, from these competing schools heretics received their corrupt material.<sup>102</sup> We should note, however, that the content of the teachings was not condemned until it infiltrated Christian boundaries in much the same way that unexplainable events penetrate paramount reality, hence the rather ubiquitous assumption that heresy threatens unity by originating within. Indeed, heresy can cause a great deal of consternation when it ruptures the perimeters of the group. Thus, sociologically speaking, heresy may be an attack from outside the boundaries of the group that is perceived as agonistic only when it acts on the group, for that which was previously viewed as impotent and irrelevant emerges as hostile and threatening, the result of its having penetrated the collective identity through sheer force. As members of the persecuted group come to accept and share an understanding of what has happened, plausibility (or social reinforcement) allows the expression of a certain interpretation, a combination of recognising the threat *as a threat* and formulating a resolving explanation for its existence.

In mentioning the concept of plausibility, we mark the crossroads of projectionist theories and the sociology of knowledge, the latter being of particular import for our development of heresy as a social process in Chapter Two. Berger and Luckmann explain plausibility as the processes whereby shared experiences achieve epistemic significance through social interaction, legitimation, and socialization.<sup>103</sup> In order for the penetrating experience not only to be reconciled with the previously held 'knowledge' of the world but also to find its way into the taken-for-granted interpretation of reality for subsequent generations, the group must reconstruct their own social world. In some sense, those with firsthand experience of the opposition undergo a paradigm shift and, so long as the collective exhibits a unified response to that which upset the social balance, participate in the process of socialization by rendering their interpretation of the events plausible for future generations through the reinforcing tools of teachings, stories, myths, traditions, rituals, etc. Infiltrating the

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<sup>102</sup> Henderson, 137. It is also worth noting that Mormon scholars, writing centuries later, would come to decry the doctrines of orthodox Christianity as the result of Neo-Platonism and general Hellenistic imposition during the first 400 years of Christian history. The inevitable outcome of this Greek influence was the Great Apostasy, the very reason truth needed to be restored.

<sup>103</sup> Berger and Luckmann, 78-83.

collective's paramount reality, in this way, heresy threatens to blur the demarcations of identity. As Lewis Coser explains, the heretic, in moments of conflict, effectively confounds insiders by embodying the agonism whilst ostensibly upholding shared values.<sup>104</sup> The import of Zito's discursive theory of heresy is thus exhibited; the group perceives the heretic as one with whom they share values precisely because the content of the heresy is articulated in familiar terms. This confusion is potentially deleterious to the boundaries of the group and demands resolution. In this manner, external opposition comes to be heresy by imposing itself on the group and subsequently receiving an inside interpretation/meaning. As we will see in later chapters, both the early Christians and the early Mormons demonstrate notable prowess in integrating social heresy into overarching meaning systems, blending narrative, ritual, traditions, and missions in a successful bid to interpret life and protect the longevity of their communities.

Before we move on in our discussion, supplying the basic structure of a sociology of heresy, it is important to reiterate our understanding of heresy as typically an exogenous threat which incites active responses by the in-group as soon as the heresy can no longer be ignored. We emphasise the exogenous nature of heresy throughout the study; however, this choice is primarily a result of our disagreement with the social definitions of heresy addressed earlier. In reality, even among the Mormons as we will see in Chapter Three, the threat may originate from within, but it very often does not. Thus, our attempt to construct an ideal type necessarily entails preference for what appears to be the most common source of opposition. Though the heretic may be a 'deviant insider', the deviance is attributable to his or her propagation of outside content. Accordingly, a sociology of heresy must focus on both the true source (internal or external) of the opposition as well as collective efforts to resolve such crises.

### **Toward a Sociology of Heresy**

Having explored available sociological views of heresy, noted the inherent subjectivity with regards to uses of the term, and elucidated what we mean by heresy as an ideal type of religious opposition, we can now dedicate space to sketching a sociology of heresy. If, as we contend, heresy is 'externally-sourced opposition

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<sup>104</sup> Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 101.

against the beliefs, personal wellness, and unity of a religious group and its members, demanding both explanation and subsequent theological renovation by those within the group', then tension undoubtedly emerges as a defining trait. This tension may be expressed in terms of agonism, alterity, opposition, or otherness, but it is important to note that the conflict may actually benefit the accusers, those who apply the label 'heretic' to some outside collective. Thus, a sociological understanding of heresy must integrate social strain with the process of social bargaining involved in responding to external opposition. In the act of defining and expressing both heresy and orthodoxy, religious groups simultaneously, perhaps inadvertently, establish collective order and identity.

Indeed, this is why Mol's model of the differentiation/identity dialectic, one of our central theoretical bases elucidated more fully in Chapter Two, equates stable order with identity.<sup>105</sup> In Mol's view, religions are able to safeguard their collective identity by establishing an orderly interpretation of existence, for as Mol states, 'there is no such thing as uninterpreted reality.'<sup>106</sup> When exogenous factors impose on the individual and/or collective, the established meaning systems must react appropriately by integrating or reinterpreting the disruptions. Acknowledging the inevitability of this process, Davies intimates a sociology of knowledge model which synthesises the thoughts of Peter Berger and John Bowker: 'Human systems of religion are thus seen as resulting from an interrelation between man's endeavour to achieve meaning and those phenomena which demand explanation or which frustrate the process of meaning construction.'<sup>107</sup> Humanity's drive for meaning-making approaches satiation when available explanations are perceptibly stable and organised, suggesting a safe location in which to ground one's identity. Thus, the efficacy of the ordered interpretations offered by religious institutions lies not in their explanatory potential but in their identity-conserving potential. However, according to Mol, too much order can prove injurious to the religious movement by limiting its degree of social flexibility.

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<sup>105</sup> Mol, 8.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>107</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *Meaning and Salvation in Religious Studies*, Studies in the History of Religions, ed. M. Heerma Van Voss, E.J. Sharpe, and R.J.Z. Werblowsky (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 27.



This introduces two key, and very much related, components of religious success: balance and tension. Following a well established precedent in sociology set by figures such as Herbert Spencer and Talcott Parsons, Mol uses the evolutionary term ‘differentiation’ to describe the adaptable half of the balancing act.<sup>108</sup> Unlike Spencer, and to some extent Parsons, Mol is less concerned with viewing social units as analogues for biological organisms and more interested in suggesting that the central argument in sociological discussions of differentiation is that social institutions adapt to changes in their environments or circumstances much as genes mutate and often benefit the species by doing so. It is between this ‘differentiation’, or adaptability, and the stable order that a balance must be reached. As religious groups encounter their immediate environment, they must possess the ability to produce meaning and identity whilst remaining adaptable to the group’s needs. The equilibrium envisioned in Mol’s theory touches the core of heresy as opposition, for the maintenance of internal group balance often means the engendering of sustained tension with outsiders.

In analyzing the common characteristics of successful religious movements, sociologist Rodney Stark concluded that ten components must be present. The second of these, what he calls a ‘medium level of tension with the surrounding environment’, is relevant for our discussion because to achieve a ‘medium level of tension’ is to achieve balance in Mol’s dialectic.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, Stark’s work often emphasises the role of distinguishing features within religious movements; tension with the environment is said to be achieved via these noteworthy characteristics of the group, and, in explicating his cost-benefit model for religious denominations, Stark places the tension-making components in the category of ‘costs’.<sup>110</sup> By imposing demands such as abstaining from premarital sex, Stark believes that religious groups actually eliminate the presence of casual, impious members. This, in turn, serves to raise the benefit of social participation within a group of loyal believers. In Stark’s view, the

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<sup>108</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Evolution of Society: Selections from Herbert Spencer’s Principles of Sociology*, ed. Robert L. Carneiro (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 3-10; Talcott Parsons, et al., *Theories of Society* (New York: Free Press, 1961), 240.

<sup>109</sup> Rodney Stark, ‘Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model,’ *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11.2 (1996): 144.

<sup>110</sup> Robert Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 238.

higher cost abets group cohesion and, in that way, the benefits are considered to be of greater value. These high costs are ‘high’ in that they require a significant degree of sacrifice. It is no surprise, then, that there is a direct link between the self-imposed costs of a group and their tension-making characteristics. The required sacrifices are only costly in relation to societal norms and expectations. Thus, by denying such norms, these costs create social tension.

Stark’s insights are perhaps too contingent on his own economically-based theory of religion and, as will be apparent in the following pages, we prefer Mol’s dialectic over Stark’s ‘medium tension’ for analysing the processes involved in resolving social heresy. That being said, his emphasis on commitment, solidarity, and future success resembles the findings of sociologist Rosabeth Kanter. Conducting research on the viability of ninety religious communities who had their origin between 1780 and 1860 in the United States, Kanter discovered that those groups who survived beyond twenty-five years all shared certain social characteristics.<sup>111</sup> Calling these traits, ‘commitment mechanisms’, Kanter explained that the successful communities placed rigid demands on their members, such as sexual abstinence, prohibiting alcoholic consumption, and banning dances. These regulations, in turn, served as border lines between the group and the greater society. What is more, by submitting to the rules, members exhibited a high level of commitment and an almost obsequious orientation to the community. Thus, the works of both Kanter and Stark highlight the importance of maintaining boundaries in religious communities, for the commitment costs of the group are the means to that end, functioning as tests of loyalty and what Mol calls ‘foci of identity’.<sup>112</sup> As characteristics unique to those within the group, commitment mechanisms may become almost synonymous with group identity; just as some individuals may locate their identity in their socio-economic class (as Marx seemed to believe was true for nearly everyone), others may focus on their celibate lifestyle or abstemious temperament in an effort to locate themselves within the group and within society.

With these ideas in mind, heresy appears as a developmental process in which a religious group negotiates with external opposition, seeking to establish resilient

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<sup>111</sup> Rosabeth M. Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

<sup>112</sup> Mol, 2-3.

identity whilst maintaining a certain amount of beneficial social tension. Manifested specifically as religious opposition, then, heresy both creates and integrates this tension with the 'other', a sort of hallmark for the soteriological schemas articulated by groups facing acute persecution. Heresy may be perceived as an external threat, but it is appropriated and utilised internally not only to define the in-group but to ensure future adaptability through the elaboration of an exceptionally explanatory system of meaning. This is precisely the assertion made by Arnal when he states that 'heresy creates orthodoxy, by forcing the articulation of what had up to that point remained unnecessary to say.'<sup>113</sup> In this way, we no longer view heresy as a solely theological notion just as we liberate it from the strictly 'discursive' definition of Zito and the organizational emphasis of Tilley.

### **Heresy as Threefold**

As we focus our lens and refine our understanding of heresy as an ideal type of religious opposition, it is important to highlight the threefold nature of the agonistic forces which initiate the formation of soteriological beliefs in relation to the self. Throughout the present study, heresy encompasses doctrinal, personal (against physical/emotional/psychological wellbeing), and societal opposition. Experiencing an attack on collective beliefs, members' wellbeing, and the social status of the community, new religious movements often respond by expressing their soteriological beliefs in a new manner, integrating all three forms of the heresy into the overarching system.

In many instances, the doctrinal heresy concerns the mode or characteristics of salvation; there is an insurmountable disagreement over issues such as individual redemption, eschatology, and access to saving knowledge. Consequently, attempts to resolve the conflict appear in the form of clearly stated soteriologies. This doctrinal opposition leads to doctrinal reinvention wherein the group and the individual both assume roles in the soteriological schema as both were targets of the opposition. Likewise, the somatic nature of persecution (the key variety of personal heresy) leads the group to embrace a theological anthropology, providing each individual with supernatural efficacy and this-worldly purpose as a recompense for social injustices.

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<sup>113</sup> Arnal, 61.

Just as individuals suffered physically in the past, so they are rewarded not only spiritually in the next life but with a potent freedom of will in the present.

Societal heresy, the third and final constitutive form of opposition, is observed in the specifically narrative mode of the soteriological beliefs. Narratives provide both an explanation of the opposition experienced by the collective and a temporal purpose for that group. The social marginalisation of the community and the greater society's assessment of the group as subversive or criminal necessitate the sociological process of boundary maintenance mentioned earlier. Clearly distinct in significant ways, the group articulates their distinguishing characteristics by embedding them in a divine, narrative plan which is viewed by adherents as cosmologically engendered. Accordingly, these soteriological constructs minimise cognitive dissonance by establishing a connection to a pre-existing religious tradition and intimating a theology of self wherein individuals eternally progress. It is this soteriological schema which offers the individual believer and his or her group remuneration for the loss of stability (thus, identity) during the experience of opposition, a beneficial outcome made possible because of the teleological content of the soteriology; special purposes offer special identities. Therefore, self-definition seems to transform in relation to changing environmental circumstances, and identity proves resilient and mobilising when it is able to take root in a divinely-sanctioned system at an early stage in the development of a religious movement. In later chapters, we argue that the hyper-individuality of the nineteenth-century religious environment in America facilitated just such a well-developed soteriological identity among the Latter-day Saints, itself an echo of the saving plan promulgated by Irenaeus and others of the second century in which individuals received pride of place as God's creation capable of progressing toward communion with the divine through obedience and perseverance. In both instances, relatively complex soteriologies helped resolve the threefold social heresy faced by the burgeoning movements.

### **Heresy and Soteriology: The Process of Interaction**

In surveying the available literature related to what might be termed the sociology of heresy, we have simultaneously excavated those sources for their valuable insights and established a conceptual base for our study of elective affinities between opposed religious groups and deifying soteriological systems. Lifting heresy

from the theological arena and defining the phenomenon as an ideal type of religious opposition in which the agonistic forces appear in three forms (societal heresy, doctrinal heresy, and personal heresy) permits us to analyse historical cases of social competition through a unique lens. Just as the formalisation of doctrine can be understood to occur in conjunction with a heightened alertness to the presence of conflicting heretical teachings, so soteriological schemas appear to be the product of a dialectical relationship between the articulation of stabilising systems of meaning and a group's encounters with social heresy.

There should be no misconceptions, however, as this progression from the experience of resistance to the formulation and possession of detailed soteriological programs is neither some kind of sociological rule, nor is it a component or an example of a general social theory of religious determinism. Yet, there is inherent value not only in acknowledging that a process does exist but also in identifying its common stages. Having expressed our definition of heresy and provided brief glimpses at a handful of theoretical influences, we now proceed with a more thorough explication of the sociological and epistemological concepts guiding the present study. So, in the next chapter, we will spotlight the perspectives and conclusions of the sociology of knowledge in addition to the theory of religion adumbrated by Mol in preparation for explaining the process by which social heresy interfaces with soteriology.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE HERETICAL PROCESS: ITS ASSUMPTIONS AND PREDICTIONS

Working from the assumption argued in Chapter One that heresy is essentially a social phenomenon involving opposition against a religious group, with the behaviours and beliefs of religious groups reflecting such social pressures in some way; it now falls to us in this chapter to explore this process more fully. This begins with an acknowledgement of two separate, yet integral, modes of thought. First, we must inquire into the epistemological progression that leads individuals and collectives to know what they know about their world, an investigation aided by the sociology of knowledge in general and Mol's theoretical framework in particular. Keeping in mind the sociology of heresy as outlined in the preceding chapter, our second constituent mode of thought will scrutinise the social processes with which we are most concerned, the events whereby heresy in the form of agonistic experiences necessitates the articulation of persuasive and stabilising beliefs. In a sense, then, the following pages progress from a high level of abstraction to a lower, and more directly-applied, level, exploring the assumptions and conclusions of the sociology of knowledge and Mol's theory of religious identity before explicating the heretical process, the latter serving as the basis for the second half of our study in which abstraction continues to give way to further concretisation as two illustrative movements are shown to embrace varieties of deification in the face of social heresy.

#### The Sociology of Knowledge

In 1850, American essayist and iconic intellectual Ralph Waldo Emerson published a collection of essays entitled, *Representative Men*. In the first entry, 'Uses of Great Men', Emerson states,

Our colossal theologies of Judaism, Christism, Buddhism, Mahometism, are the necessary and structural action of the human mind...Our theism is the purification of the human mind. Man can paint, or make, or think nothing but man.<sup>1</sup>

Although intended as preliminary thoughts on the important role individual figures play in the thought-lives of societies, these words encapsulate the basic premises of the phenomenological sociology of knowledge, a philosophically-based approach to

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Representative Men*, The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, ed. George Sampson (London: George Bell & Sons, 1906), 358.

studying social phenomena which is especially applicable to the analysis of religious data. Emerson's proposition that 'theologies...are the necessary and structural action of the human mind' reiterates the fundamental arguments of the projection theories explained in the previous chapter. That which one discovers or observes in religion (rituals, symbols, emotions, relationship structures, relational roles, beliefs, etc.) is the necessary reflection of society, of the inevitably social nature of human existence. It follows, *ipso facto*, that the content of religious belief is essentially the ascription of sacred language and posture to human experience.

Experience, then, is the foundation for all social institutions, religion being just one of many. If this claim is accepted axiomatically, it is almost unavoidable that human experience becomes the object of intellectual scrutiny. From sociologists like Simmel and Durkheim, comes the methodological presupposition that to study religion is, first, to study social interactions and processes. These daily activities constitute human experiences *in toto*. This is not to say that individuals *qua* individuals do not perceive, interpret, and respond to elements of their environment unaided by others. What is suggested, however, is that the meaning attached to any experience is socially-dependent. In other words, all experiences are rendered comprehensible only because they are inseparable from the society in which they occurred.

This is the contention of theories such as that espoused and intimated by Berger and Luckmann who begin their work by explicitly saying as much,<sup>2</sup> and it is directly related to the comments in the previous chapter concerning the potency of external experiences that penetrate the social sphere of a religious group. It was noted that, as an example, persecution is only meaningfully interpreted as opposition and only catalyses change when it actually acts on members of the group. Thus, the social significance of persecution is directly related to its experiential proximity; it must move ever closer, transforming from abstract thought to potentiality and on to recognised reality. This process, in which alienable contemplations become shared realities, is the exact concern of the sociology of knowledge. Indeed, Berger and Luckmann claim that any true 'sociology of knowledge' must not only address what

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<sup>2</sup> Berger and Luckmann, 13. 'The basic contentions of the argument of this book are implicit in its title and sub-title, namely, that reality is socially constructed...'

constitutes ‘knowledge’ in a given collective but also ‘the process by which any body of “knowledge” comes to be socially established as “reality”.’<sup>3</sup>

Before discussing the application of this school of sociological thought to the study of religious phenomena, it will prove helpful for us to provide an overview of the key figures and ideas behind the approach. That which follows is not intended, then, to be a comprehensive history of the sociology of knowledge; rather, it is a brief sketch of the major thinkers and assumptions standing behind the methodological perspective taken up by the present study. Consequently, the amount of emphasis and attention dedicated to each writer is admittedly imbalanced. This is not only due to limitations on space but to our limited purpose – namely, the utilisation of sociology of knowledge principles for the establishment of a sociology of heresy beneficial and applicable to religious studies. Most importantly, it is to be demonstrated that this methodology particularly benefits the study of early Christians and early Mormons.

### **Karl Mannheim**

It could be claimed that any discussion of the sociology of knowledge should begin with an examination of the philosophical writings of Edmund Husserl. As an exponent (arguably the father) of phenomenology, Husserl undoubtedly influenced numerous other thinkers. His notion of *epoché*, or the bracketing of judgements about the existence of the external world, led him to publish a book on the subject in 1913.<sup>4</sup> It is this idea, that one might observe and analyse phenomena exactly as they are perceived by the consciousness, which was adopted by the sociologists of knowledge. In fact, Husserl directly influenced notable thinkers such as Max Scheler, Karl Mannheim, and Alfred Schutz. In turn, each of these individuals participated in the establishment of a sociology concerned with epistemological questions in society.

Karl Mannheim is frequently listed as the father of the sociology of knowledge although Max Scheler coined the term *Wissenssoziologie* in 1924.<sup>5</sup> Though Mannheim’s writings were contemporaneous with those of Scheler, the latter argued

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, vol.1 (The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Max Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980). This essay was first published in German in 1924 but received greater attention when it was included in a collection of essays one year later.



against the validity of a methodology combining phenomenology and sociological inquiry. Mannheim, by contrast, set out to accomplish just that. In *Ideology and Utopia*, he began a systematic construction of a sociology of knowledge. This, he said, would entail the subjection of ‘all intellectual phenomena without exception, to the question: In connection with what social structure did they arise and are they valid?’<sup>6</sup> Mannheim was especially interested in critiquing Karl Marx and, thus, much of *Ideology and Utopia* presents arguments to that end. As Bryan Turner notes in the introduction to Mannheim’s work, Mannheim gave prominence to social classes as the location for the sociological phenomena with which he was concerned (a nod to Marx) but also expanded his theories to include other institutions and organisations such as generations.<sup>7</sup> Ideologies were the product of dominant social classes, and utopian ideals were seen as the outcome of subordinate classes struggling for power. However, Mannheim realised that much more could be said or derived from this understanding of social pressures and their relationship to modes of thought. He insisted that sociologists ought to investigate ‘when and where social structures come to express themselves in the structure of assertions, and in what sense the former concretely determine the latter.’<sup>8</sup> Such inquiries need not simply focus on social classes but on the competition arising between other social groups such as ‘status groups, sects, occupational groups, schools, etc.’<sup>9</sup>

Drawing on the idea of the life-world promulgated by Husserl, which, as we highlighted in Chapter One, referred to the immediate and taken-for-granted realm of experience in which the common man is conscious of his environment, Mannheim began to view thoughts as context dependent. In concluding his work, he offers the reader this concise definition of the sociology of knowledge approach: ‘Sociology of knowledge seeks to obtain systematic comprehension of the relationship between social existence and thought.’<sup>10</sup> He believed that Marx misunderstood the ‘existential

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Collected Works of Karl Mannheim, vol.1 (London: Routledge, 1997), 254.

<sup>7</sup> Bryan S. Turner, ‘Introduction’, in Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Collected Works of Karl Mannheim, vol.1 (London: Routledge, 1997), xliii.

<sup>8</sup> Mannheim, 239.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 278.

connectedness' of ideologies and other political thought structures, thus neglecting the relative nature of social conflict. Mannheim spoke of the 'perspective of a thinker' as 'the subject's whole mode of conceiving things as determined by his historical and social setting.'<sup>11</sup> This was a sort of relativity (*Situations-gebundenheit*) present even in social-scientific investigations. The investigator approaches his or her topic from a certain perspective (e.g., positivism, functionalism, Marxism, etc.) and, thus, produces a study with links to an underlying social reality.

It is for this reason that Mannheim critiques the 'history of ideas' approach. In his view, to assume that intellectual history is a timeline of individuals and their thoughts is to overlook the fact that those concepts arise out of living experiences in social situations. How any 'problem' is handled often depends on 'forces arising out of living experience'.<sup>12</sup> In other words, theoretical formulations are always based on actual, collective realities encountered by individuals and groups who inhabit a certain social position. Along with sociologists like Simmel,<sup>13</sup> Mannheim places special emphasis on social conflict as unfailingly formative for group life. Preferring the term 'competition', Mannheim offered the following observation on this phenomenon as the quintessential example of social relativity:

We may regard competition as such a representative case in which extra-theoretical processes affect the emergence and the direction of the development of knowledge. Competition controls not merely the economic activity through the mechanism of the market, not merely the course of political and social events, but furnishes also the motor impulse behind diverse interpretations of the world which, when their social background is uncovered, reveal themselves as the intellectual expressions of conflicting groups struggling for power.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, it was this understanding of competition that led to the general topic of his book, the two thought-forms (ideology and utopia) resulting from group conflict.

Whilst it is true that many of his ideas find more robust expression in the work of Alfred Schutz (our next subject), Mannheim's synthesis of Marxist and Husserlian principles successfully furthered the conceptualisation of the sociology of knowledge.

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<sup>11</sup> Mannheim, 239.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Georg Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations* (New York: The Free Press, 1955), 13. Here, Simmel refers to conflict as 'a form of sociation.' He understood collective solidarity and identity as a product of harmony and disharmony within the social setting.

<sup>14</sup> Mannheim, 241.

Many of the issues addressed are of significant import for sociological studies of religious groups. The fundamental claim, later criticised by numerous scholars, that an individual's 'whole mode of conceiving' is 'determined by his historical and social setting' is of signal importance for the present study and will receive attention later alongside similar statements by Peter Berger. In the interim, however, it must be noted that Mannheim not only offers a valuable critique of Marxist theories but also spotlights the social processes at work under the level of collective consciousness. Within the context of a sociology of heresy, one might even envision Mannheim as an agent of orthodoxy, bringing awareness to Bourdieu's *doxa* and, in the process, serving as his own example of the sociology of knowledge; his discussions of the taken-for-granted themselves articulated in phenomenological terms which assume multiple planes of reality. By explaining the socially-dependent nature of thoughts, he effectively addresses both the inconspicuous forces working in society and their absence in the individual's everyday life-world.

More importantly, Mannheim's discontent with the 'history of ideas' is instructive in an unexpected way. He notes that the inter-subjective character of human interaction is of epistemic value as individuals come to know what they know as a result of existing in community. This observation, then, leads Mannheim to take issue with the method of Marxist interpretations of society. Marxism lacks a certain methodological or analytical distance between the investigator and the phenomena investigated.<sup>15</sup> Marx's theories were doomed to a low level of abstraction and a correspondingly low level of generalisation because of this. The analyst only recognised the 'theoretical formulations' in his or her 'opponent'. This, Mannheim attributed to a 'subconscious reluctance to think out the implications of a concretely formulated insight'.<sup>16</sup> It also meant that Marxist concepts were relegated to fairly concrete instances, inseparable from specific historical contexts. Retrospection allowed Mannheim to suggest ways in which his similar sociological concepts could avoid this fate.

Mannheim explicitly claimed that social classes were the primary focus of sociological inquiry, but he was careful to suggest that other types of social categories also demonstrated the same phenomena. This, in his estimation, meant that the power

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

struggles present in society resulted not only in class conflict, with each class sharing a certain perspective and interpretation of reality, but also in other social institutions. These groups, including those of a religious nature, each possessed a unique mode of thought.<sup>17</sup> It is in this assertion that one finds a direct, albeit fragile, segue to the present study. One topic which is to be addressed in much more depth in the fourth chapter is the ubiquitous tendency of religious sects, in their nascent stages, to assert a special connection to a pre-existing religious tradition. Both the early Christians and the early Mormons, for example, claimed connections to various aspects of Judaism. For the former, this was perhaps to be expected given the overtly Jewish setting in which their new community had arisen. Whilst it is admittedly speculative, early Mormons may have postulated ties to ancient Israel as a result of Joseph Smith's sense of self as a prophetic figure combined with the pressing need to establish credibility among the Protestant splinter-groups of early nineteenth-century America.

Mannheim's theories go some way toward elucidating this affair, however. Instead of simply occurring as a conscious, legitimising effort, the struggle to establish historical connections was made plausible in the first place because its formulations and concepts arrived in recognisable, acceptable forms. This is not to say that issues of context are meaningless; rather, it is to claim that the social contexts of groups separated by time and geography may actually present common characteristics. Multiple religious groups may offer various answers to a shared existential question and, in doing so, reveal the social position which engendered the question. This is important for comprehending the ease with which religious movements anchor themselves to other historical traditions. Very little collective energy is expended in establishing the tie because the collective subconscious already possesses an affinity for the mode of thought implicit in the structure of the historical group's expressions. In as much as those expressions indicate certain concrete experiences, and when those concrete experiences resemble the new group's circumstances, the older tradition will be adopted and integrated into the beliefs and *habitus* of the emerging movement.

This allows for the observation made by Christian Church historian F.C. Burkitt who said that when new information is learned about the universe, it is possible to hold onto old religion without any consternation, but new religions must

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<sup>17</sup> Mannheim, 237.

take account of the universal truths recently discovered.<sup>18</sup> In other words, a social setting providing previously unknown ‘knowledge’ might force a new religion to reconcile the information with their beliefs or risk extermination, whilst an old religion would feel no such pressure. It is for this very reason, then, that a new religious movement such as Mormonism might establish ties with one of the most ancient of all traditions. In the light of Mannheim’s thoughts, and the sociology of knowledge more generally, this highlights an interesting phenomenon. In investigating the beginnings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for instance, one might be tempted to assume that experiences such as the religious fervour of the Second Great Awakening and other social interactions would cause correspondingly innovative, imaginative reactions from the Mormons. The truth, however, is that social conflict can actually force groups to rely on deeply entrenched forms of religiosity, an argument presented by Martin Marty in relation to fundamentalist religious groups and their propensity for retrieving ‘doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past’ as a means of fortifying in-group identity by presenting such fundamentals ‘alongside unprecedented claims and doctrinal innovations.’<sup>19</sup> Noting this same level of complexity with regards to the construction of social knowledge, Mannheim concluded his book by expressing some concern over the deterministic tendency of the sociology of knowledge. Instead of a strict causal relationship between social experience and thought-forms, Mannheim proposed a model in which subjective thoughts of individuals also contributed to the overall agenda of sociology.<sup>20</sup> In gaining an understanding not only of social groups and their thought processes but of the subjective, unique interpretations of the ‘actors’ and the vantages they hold to be absolute, a broader perspective can be achieved by the investigator.

Thus, early Mormon modes of thought may have existed as a function of specific social pressures, but they also borrowed from and exhibited distinctive rationalisations of historical thought-forms. This place for the individual in sociology of knowledge theories was taken up later by others. Mannheim sought to resolve

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<sup>18</sup> F.C. Burkitt, *Church & Gnosis: A Study of Christian Thought and Speculation in the Second Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 35.

<sup>19</sup> Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Mannheim, 270-71.

what he admittedly recognised as shortcomings in his thoughts, but much was left to be considered by those who succeeded him. That being said, his acknowledgement that a possible key to the problems of sociology of knowledge lies in the individual made way for important theories in religious identity. Before turning to that topic, as intimated by Mol, we must first explore the work of Alfred Schutz in relation to the sociology of knowledge and phenomenology.

### **Alfred Schutz**

In Alfred Schutz, we encounter a thorough synthesis of Husserlian phenomenology with the specific methodological concerns of sociology still present in the first half of the twentieth century. Like Mannheim, Schutz owes much of his thought to the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl. In fact, Schutz acknowledges this debt in *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, a gesture that elicited a great deal of enthusiasm from Husserl who, shortly after reading the book, offered Schutz a position as his assistant. However, unlike Mannheim who was preoccupied with critiquing Marx, Schutz desired to contribute to discussions of sociological methodology by clarifying some of the ambiguities in Weberian concepts. In particular, Schutz intended an exposition of the unrealised potential in Weber's ideal types. Believing that Weber was correct to posit such an analytical tool, Schutz argued that the ideal type was based on 'tacit presuppositions', needing further exploration.<sup>21</sup> The ultimate value of Schutz's work lies in his successful amalgamation of Husserl with sociology and, more narrowly, his application of phenomenological principles like *Epoché* and *Lebenswelt* to the interpretive sociology of Weber.

Schutz joins Mannheim in claiming that the analyst, in contradistinction to the actor, attempts to understand the latter 'by defining the total perspective and seeing it as a function of a certain social position.'<sup>22</sup> Yet, Schutz is quick to say that the same effort to establish meaning demonstrated by those observed also occurs when a sociologist directs his or her *actio* toward the *actum* of the layperson.<sup>23</sup> These terms

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<sup>21</sup> Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Mannheim, 252.

<sup>23</sup> Schutz, 39.

represent one example of Schutz's attempt at minimising ambiguity. Instead of 'action', he prefers to delineate between actions in progress (*actio*) and 'the constituted act' produced by those efforts (*actum*). Sociologists of knowledge accept that the subjects of their investigations exhibit actions and resulting outcomes, but they must also recognise that their own studies replicate this process. Just as the layperson exerts energy as he or she experiences social events and interactions and, subsequently, ascribes meaning to those experiences, so the sociologist constructs systems of meaning from the data gathered during the course of the study. For Schutz, this act of meaning-making is an inclusive human phenomenon. It not only involves the 'hardening of...ideologies into ways of life' but may be further reduced to include individuals' interpretations (of themselves and others).<sup>24</sup> In this way, the objective observer has something in common with the actor – namely, the process by which they both come to understand the information received through inter-subjective social relationships. Using Husserl's terminology, both the phenomenologist and the lay actor suspend judgments about the natural undergirding of social phenomena; the former does so purposefully, the latter unwittingly.

Schutz discusses Weber's ideal types from this perspective, suggesting that ideal types have utility, and existence, beyond formal analysis. As all individuals are engaged in social relationships, all use ideal types in order to understand others better. Schutz refers to the immediate, directly-experienced world of the individual as the *Umwelt*.<sup>25</sup> In this social reality, other people may directly influence the individual because the latter shares space and time with these other players. Consequently, intentions and motives interact, just as biographies overlap. This reality, or social constitution, results in what Schutz refers to as a 'we-relationship'.<sup>26</sup> The *Umwelt* engenders various thought-forms and is a significant factor in the behaviours and beliefs that will come to represent 'knowledge' for the individual.

There are, however, other social realities for Schutz. These include the various social realms in which others are only indirectly connected to the actor. There

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 11. Schutz believes Mannheim's focus is too narrow as it relegates all of sociology to the study of the development of ideologies throughout history. Instead, sociology ought to trace such social phenomena back to a fundamental process at the heart of the human experience.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>26</sup> Schutz, 165.

is the world of contemporaries (*Mitwelt*), the world of predecessors (*Vorwelt*), and that of successors (*Folgewelt*).<sup>27</sup> The latter two may impact one's life-world through their role in conscious decisions and behaviours. Even so, it is the reality of social contemporaries that seems most important to Schutz, for it is in this idea of a *Mitwelt* that Schutz can finally refine Weber's ideal type. One's contemporaries are those with whom time, but not necessarily space, is shared. As a result, they are not known in the way that a consociate (those in the *Umwelt*) is known, immediately and meaningfully; individuals make sense of their contemporaries by comparing them to 'general types'.<sup>28</sup> Without direct access to the contemporary, the mutuality of meaning construction is inhibited and all experience is 'predicative'. The necessary response, then, is to derive generalities from social experience and to use these as referential guides to which one can then compare and contrast his or her contemporaries. In essence, this was the relocation of the ideal type from the realm of analysis to the social reality of the everyday. In this way, Schutz believes he has redeemed Weber's concept by outlining the social circumstances in which it is less an ostensibly dubious abstraction and more a naturally-occurring, objective tool.

In delineating multiple social 'worlds', Schutz unequivocally finds himself in the midst of epistemological concerns. Although his attention often lies on the inter-subjective nature of social interactions and their dialectical effects on consciousnesses, such an emphasis inevitably leads to discussions of individual and corporate knowledge. Here, Schutz offers a launch pad for the topic in his idea of paramount reality as 'spatial and temporal immediacy', a social realm greatly affecting one's subjective knowledge.<sup>29</sup> The relationships experienced within the *Umwelt* not only construct knowledge of one's consociates but, in demanding cognisance of the immediate, also remind one of the indirect reality of contemporaries.

The phenomenological system promulgated by Schutz is integral to understanding the applicability of sociology of knowledge for religious studies. This

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 142-43.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 181. Schutz asserts that the absence of inter-subjectivity results in this need for generalising classifications.

<sup>29</sup> Schutz, 163-72. Although the term 'paramount reality' does not occur in this section of his work, it is here that he describes in detail his thoughts on 'we-relationships' as the consequent function of 'directly experienced social reality'.



is a result of his tireless effort to synthesise Weberian sociology with Husserlian philosophy in order to arrive at a less ambiguous, more systematised sociological perspective. Ultimately, Schutz surpasses Mannheim by offering sociological inquiry a broader lens through which to observe the entire social world. Where Mannheim focused more on the general claim that thought-forms are existentially anchored (primarily in response to Marx), Schutz agrees but carries the logic further by focusing on individuals, subjective knowledge, and the various planes of social experience. Both thinkers concur on the fundamental principles of the sociology of knowledge, but Schutz introduces a comprehensive structuring and repackaging of Husserl's phenomenology for social-scientific purposes. Additionally, Schutz's salient position in the later works of Peter Berger results in an almost obligatory mention of the phenomenologist. After Schutz, few influential works arose on the sociology of knowledge until the topic was again taken up in the 1960s.<sup>30</sup> In that decade, Peter Berger is incontrovertibly noted as the preeminent figure for the revitalisation of sociology of knowledge approaches and, more importantly for the present work, the application of such methods to the study of religion.

### **Peter Berger**

Our step into the 1960s and 70s is not only one of chronological necessity but, in important ways, is one of conceptual inertia. In so much as Peter Berger catalysed the renewed interest in all things concerning the sociology of knowledge as well as synthesised the views of Schutz, Durkheim, Mannheim, *et alii* and applied that amalgamated view specifically to the social institution of religion, an analysis of his work is irrefutably warranted. Berger not only left an indelible mark on the scientific study of religion through his works during these decades, he also contributed significant insights which are germane to our present study. Although his theories have been thoroughly contested, and will not be simply embraced without scrutiny here, he will hold an undisputed seat at the table for any work purporting to be influenced by sociology of knowledge in the future and serves our purposes more precisely by acting as a conceptual bridge between the slightly handicapping level of

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<sup>30</sup> One arguable exception could be found in: Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Construction* (New York: Free Press, 1949). Merton arrived at similar conclusions, however, not only through Mannheim but also through Durkheim and Simmel. He attempted to combine the structuralist-functional aspects of the latter two theorists with the phenomenological outlook of the former. Thus, Merton's thought should not be considered to reside in the direct vein of Husserl and Schutz.

abstractness in Mannheim or Schutz and the theories of religious identity espoused by Mol.

In the previous chapter, the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (*The Social Construction of Reality*) was considered in the light of projectionist theories of society. Certainly, the sort of dialectical projection of humanity onto society and vice versa constitutes a large portion of their argument; however, the other side of the conceptual coin is their strong integration and reformulation of sociology of knowledge principles. This is apparent from the outset in the subtitle to their influential work: *A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. The book was intended to 'deal not only with the empirical variety of "knowledge" in human societies, but also with the processes by which *any* body of "knowledge" comes to be socially established *as* "reality" (original emphasis).'<sup>31</sup> Offering something of a correction on the scope and direction of the sociology of knowledge, and acknowledging that it had received little development in the years following World War II, Berger and Luckmann introduced their joint contribution in this way:

It is our contention, then, that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'. And in so far as all human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street. In other words, we contend that *the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality* (original emphasis).<sup>32</sup>

In this succinct primer, we easily recognise the influence of Schutz, and Husserl through him. Concerning themselves with the 'taken-for-granted "reality"' as it is crystallised for the common man, Berger and Luckmann betray their indebtedness to Husserl's *Lebenswelt* as well as Schutz's notions of *Umwelt* and 'consociates'. There is also an important nod to a methodological stance for which Berger would later become something of a poster-child. Three years earlier, in 1963, Berger had authored *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*.<sup>33</sup> In this introduction to the sociological task, Berger is careful to inform his reader that sociology is not for

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<sup>31</sup> Berger and Luckmann, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (New York: Doubleday, 1963).

those ‘who prefer to believe that society is just what they were taught in Sunday School.’<sup>34</sup> This underscores what would become much more fully expressed in the years to come - namely, that Berger believes a sociologist must proceed from a place of ‘methodological atheism’.<sup>35</sup> Unquestionably stemming from the *epoché*, or bracketing, attributed to the phenomenological enterprise, Berger’s ‘methodological atheism’ is integral to his sociology of knowledge. In order to analyse the processes by which social experiences generate and solidify religious ‘knowledge’ for the actors of society it is imperative that the observer abrogate any assumption that the numinous exists as a concrete, distinct, reality. In other words, the social construction of reality is not held in abeyance for the religious. Religious institutions, as elements of social organisation, are necessarily seen as socially-constructed projections of human interaction within a society.

In singling out religious institutions, we provide a convenient, and important, change in direction for our assessment of Berger’s thoughts. His joint work with Thomas Luckmann was not specifically interested in religion, and for this reason, the following pages focus almost exclusively on Berger’s solo work. In fact, the reader’s attention will, from this point forward, be primarily directed toward *The Social Reality of Religion*, a tangential work whose genesis and foundational presuppositions are to be located in *The Social Construction of Reality*.<sup>36</sup> In the former, Berger applies the theories espoused in the latter to the social institution of religion. Taken together, these two books commenced, and fuelled, a lasting discussion focused on the validity of sociology in general, and the sociology of knowledge in particular, for the academic study of religion. This is testified to in the amount of attention dedicated to the sociology of knowledge during the 60s, 70s, and 80s.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>35</sup> At least, this is how many of Berger’s contemporaries viewed his position. See, Nathan Grossman, ‘On Peter Berger’s Definition of Religion,’ *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 14.3 (1975): 289; and Ninian Smart, *The Science of Religion & the Sociology of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 57, 74-91. Grossman names ‘methodological atheism’ as one of Berger’s primary concerns. Smart dedicates an entire chapter to critiquing Berger’s theories. In place of Berger’s position, Smart offers ‘methodological agnosticism’.

<sup>36</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973). This work was published in the United States with the title, *The Sacred Canopy* and first appeared in 1967. This was just one year after Berger’s work with Luckmann and is to be seen as ‘tangential’ in that it is a spin-off from the latter.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, this period saw the following journals: *Research in Sociology of Knowledge, sciences and art* and *International Yearbook for Sociology of Knowledge and Religion* (edited by Thomas

### *The Social Reality of Religion*

As the follow-up to Berger's work with Luckmann, *The Social Reality of Religion* attempts to extricate the same sociology of knowledge concepts from the high level of abstract theorising which plagued Mannheim, Schutz, and Berger's own previous work. Here, Berger's goal is to present a case for the social dependency of religion by utilising the same language and basic theories found in *The Social Construction of Reality*. For instance, and integral to understanding Berger's thoughts, he continues to discuss the threefold epistemological process whereby social experience comes to assert itself as 'reality' for the layman. In the opening pages, Berger explains the steps of this 'dialectic process of society':

These are externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation...Externalisation is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectivation is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalisation is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness.<sup>38</sup>

If this seems a bit stilted or dense, he offers a more succinct summation:

It is through externalisation that society is a human product. It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality *sui generis*. It is through internalisation that man is a product of society.<sup>39</sup>

The latter passage exposes a key component of both Berger's thought and our own study, viz., the dialectical nature of society formation.<sup>40</sup> Humans construct society

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Luckmann). Berger's thoughts and assertions also found their way into theological studies: R. Scroggs, 'The Sociological Interpretation of the New Testament: The Present State of Research,' *New Testament Studies* 26 (1980): 165-79; E.E. Hindson, 'The Sociology of Knowledge and Biblical Interpretation,' *Theologia Evangelica* 17 (1984): 33-38; Gary V. Smith, 'The Application of Principles from the Sociology of Knowledge for Understanding the Setting, Tradition and Theology of the Prophets,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32.2 (1989): 145-57; and Langdon Gilkey, Schubert Ogden & David W. Tracy, 'Responses to Peter Berger,' *Theological Studies* 39.3 (1978): 486-507.

<sup>38</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Durkheim, 3-21. Of course, the essence of Berger's formula lies in the introduction to Durkheim's *Elementary Forms*, 'Sociology of Religion and Theories of Knowledge', in which the French sociologist asserts that basic epistemological categories are 'born in religion and of religion; they are a product of religious thought' just as 'religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities'.

just as society constructs humans, and, accordingly, Berger's theory demands the inclusion of a sort of giving and receiving on the part of humanity.

Externalisation, the giving element, is perhaps one of the most contentious portions of sociological theories, particularly as they relate to religion. The tension, of course, results from the basic claim that religion, as one of any number of social institutions, is a product of humanity. On the surface, and especially for those less versed in the social sciences, this is a direct assault on theological concepts such as revelation, the immutability of the divine, etc.<sup>41</sup> Yet, Berger anticipates this reaction from his theological colleagues and, as a consequence, includes an appendix entitled, 'Sociological and Theological Perspectives' in which he addresses the theological concerns which he suspects will arise.<sup>42</sup>

In the face of such criticism, Berger is always careful to underline the cyclical or dialectical nature of his theory. Although his book begins with a discussion of externalisation and 'world construction', moving on to objectivation and then internalisation, he understands these three as somewhat simultaneous events, together constituting the phenomenon of socialisation. In his collaboration with Luckmann, Berger describes the early development of human babies as one involving 'socio-cultural' influences more so than any 'biologically fixed substratum'.<sup>43</sup> This, they claim, is a function of the foetal developments that must take place for human infants up to one year after birth, a unique characteristic when compared to the 'organismic developments, which in the animal are completed in the mother's body'.<sup>44</sup> The human, then, continues its foundational physiological development alongside its initial social and psychological development. As a result, Berger and Luckmann believe that there is only 'human nature in the sense of anthropological constants (for

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<sup>41</sup> Paul R. Johnson, 'Society, Knowledge, and Religion: The perspective of Peter Berger,' *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 3.3 (1976): 300. Johnson takes what is, ostensibly, a minority view in his statement that Berger's three-fold process does not preclude revelation. 'Revelation, once it enters the realm of human knowledge, becomes subject to the three-fold process Berger describes...'

<sup>42</sup> Note that Berger follows this publication with two books addressing his own personal, Christian faith and the more general grievances raised in response to his sociological theories: *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (New York: Doubleday, 1969); and *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Doubleday, 1979).

<sup>43</sup> Berger and Luckmann, 67.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

example, world-openness and plasticity of instinctual structure)'.<sup>45</sup> In our future discussion of Mol's theories on religious identity, a different take on biological plasticity will be encountered. For now, however, it is important to note that these assertions lie behind Berger's emphasis of the socialisation process. The 'reality' and 'knowledge' possessed or perceived by any member of society is, by necessity, constructed by the inescapably social nature of human development. In Berger's view, if we begin our very existence engaged in a relationship with our social environment, then that environment not only shapes us but is, itself, shaped by us.

Indeed, without some comprehension of the dialectic at work, Berger's thoughts are unequivocally inscrutable. For instance, he can say, '...all culture originates and is rooted in the subjective consciousness of human beings' but then describe internalisation, just six pages later, as 'the reabsorption into consciousness of the objectivated world in such a way that *the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself*' (emphasis added).<sup>46</sup> This is only comprehended when one grasps the incessant nature of the cycle and the participatory role of each person in society. Berger is quick to note that individuals are not passive mediums moulded by society into whatever image the latter desires. Instead, individuals are 'co-producers' of society whose involvement is required to maintain the objective and subjective realities society has come to accept.

Turning to the concept of objectivation, Berger suggests that the products of externalisation are eventually, and so sufficiently, alienated from humanity that they then acquire a nature all their own. Culture is, at least as far as the man in the street is concerned, perceived as *sui generis*. This is true in at least two ways: 1) Culture is 'objective in that it confronts man as an assemblage of objects...existing outside his own consciousness', and 2) It is able to be experienced collectively, inclusive of all.<sup>47</sup> The second aspect is particularly important for it relates back to the externalisation component. Just as all members of society take part in the process of constructing that social world, so all take part in its legitimation through shared awareness and the collective postulation of society's objectivity. By perceiving culture as an entity apart, humanity renders that very idea plausible. Many of Berger's most helpful

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>46</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 18 & 24.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 20.

concepts enter the argument at precisely this point. His indebtedness to the aforementioned phenomenologists becomes conspicuous here as he discusses objectivation as a perception of the ‘actor’ in society. Berger sees an unambiguous distinction between the man in the street and the analyst or student of religion. Society is legitimated and maintained by the everyday individual who typically participates in this process without cognisance of the fact. Like Husserl on the *Lebenswelt* or Schutz on the *Umwelt*, Berger offers insightful glosses on the paramount reality of the members of society. The various conditions and constitutions of culture exist within the actor’s immediate reality as irrefutably objective.

The collective, or communal, variety of objectivation which is at work, exemplifies what Berger calls ‘legitimation’. This, he defines as ‘socially objectivated “knowledge” that serves to explain and justify the social order.’<sup>48</sup> As members of society engage in inter-subjective relationships, attend social gatherings, reinforce social norms, etcetera; they continually reiterate and substantiate the order of things. Profoundly expressed by Berger, legitimations are the answers offered to the question ‘why’.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps more importantly, legitimations are the readily available, traditional, taken-for-granted answers to such questions. When alternative answers are offered, however, one might encounter what Berger describes elsewhere as ‘ruptures of paramount reality’.<sup>50</sup> In these moments, the objective ‘knowledge’ is challenged, and the plausibility structures are threatened. By plausibility structures, Berger essentially means the social foundation or grounding of the accepted knowledge, both its objectivated and internalised forms. In most cases, the plausibility structure is the particular society and culture of the nation or continent itself. Social norms, notions of the taboo, scientific consensus, and even ethical values combine to form a concretised base on which legitimations may flourish.

When such plausibility structures are in place, a sort of *doxa* exists. Recall, however, the particulars of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept and its application by William Arnal to heresy studies mentioned in the preceding chapter. Essentially, *doxa* qua *doxa* only subsists in the absence of any threat against it or, more basically, any

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>49</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 38.

<sup>50</sup> Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, 40.

uncovering of it. The same is true for plausibility. Existing as 'knowledge' of the mundane, plausibility structures remain stable and functional so long as no threat dislodges them from their subterranean position, elevating them to the level of collective consciousness and revealing their shortcomings. In these moments, Berger states, complex legitimations are needed to counter the potentially deleterious impact of the threat.<sup>51</sup> As an example, he suggests that the mutual antagonism between Islam and Christianity during the Middle Ages demanded that each tradition produce explanations for their aggression against the other. Prior to such conflict, the active plausibility structures sufficed. After the fateful encounter and cultural clash, however, new theoretical knowledge was needed to justify both the resistance against, and the very existence of, the other religion. Later, as our attention turns toward the process of heresy and the articulation of soteriological schemas, this phenomenon will be clearly recognisable in the early histories of both Christianity and Mormonism. As we will see, when religious groups composed of members who share a life-world and a specific interpretation of reality experience the 'rupture' or penetration of that reality by some exogenous, oppositional force they often erect complex legitimating belief systems in order to ensure balance and render all threats innocuous.

Here, before summarising internalisation as the third component of Berger's theory, it is worth mentioning that objectivation ultimately refers to a perceived ontological fissure between the projected thought-forms (the consequent products of externalisation) and the human society from which they emerged. As a result, the socially-constructed world is understood to be simply 'how it is' without much reflection on how it came to be. A similar observation, arrived at by very different means and in a very different context, has been noted by sociologist Steve Bruce. Bruce comments on the ecclesiastical structures of 'liberal religions': 'For any entity to endure it must have some identity and that requires some consensus and that in turn requires coercion and that in turn requires a belief system that permits the individual to be overruled.'<sup>52</sup> Bruce is admittedly involved in an entirely different argument; however, his statement concerning the indispensable authority of belief systems seems pertinent to our present discussion, suggesting that issues of objective power and authority relate to issues of social identity and consensus. For Berger, the

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<sup>51</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Steve Bruce, *Choice and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 171.



objectivated nomos, the ordered understanding of reality, effectively reigns over the individual members of the religious group. This is precisely because the individual tacitly accepts this world and inhabits it freely. In this way, the *Lebenswelt* has what anthropologist Clifford Geertz would call ‘an aura of factuality’; it seems objectively, undeniably true in its own right.<sup>53</sup>

The most ubiquitous example of the inseparable processes of externalisation and objectivation is that of human language, a symbol system that has been explored from a wide variety of perspectives and for a wide variety of reasons.<sup>54</sup> For their part, Berger and Luckmann dedicate the first substantive section of their work to the topic, making good use of the obvious parallels between language and the construction of societies as well as providing us with a smooth and cogent transition from general social theory to specific concerns within religious studies. For instance, Berger and Luckmann note that language comes in many varieties from many cultures and is established gradually and inconspicuously, developing within certain societies from the communicative demands of social interaction. This, of course, is notably correlative with Berger’s idea of externalisation, for language comes to possess patterns, norms, and conventions, gradually receiving its own standards and rules. As a result, children are not encouraged to create their own language through social living but are taught the socially-accepted standards of the existing language. Once again, legitimation and plausibility are at play. This may be seen, for example, in the way that linguistic norms, taken for granted in one English-speaking nation, may not be so in another; one may read the daily news ‘whilst’ eating his or her breakfast in England, only to read ‘while’ eating breakfast when visiting New York.<sup>55</sup> Such conventions are rarely challenged and, more importantly for the sociology of knowledge, they nearly always reside below the conscious level.

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<sup>53</sup> Clifford Geertz, ‘Religion as a Cultural System,’ *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (New York: Praeger, 1966), 4. Geertz defined religion as ‘a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic’. It is not a far step to apply this same definition to Berger’s socially-constructed world as a whole.

<sup>54</sup> Whether one arrives at this conclusion through the philosophical ruminations of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the discursive studies of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, or the structuralist considerations of Claude Lévi-Strauss; the significance of language for our understanding of the world cannot be gainsaid. For both Berger and Luckmann, the emphasis on language was partially due to the influence of the ‘symbolic interactionism’ of Herbert Blumer and George Herbert Mead.

<sup>55</sup> ‘While’ is occasionally used in the UK, but the reverse scenario is extremely rare.

Of course, just as language manifests in various forms and requires cultural and societal legitimations to flourish, so religion can be viewed as an example of the same social construction processes. In this way, and for this reason, Berger justifies his follow-up to *The Social Construction of Reality*, shifting the focus from society in general to religion in particular. For Berger, the latter is a sort of special microcosm, and he proposes unique terminology in order to capture the religious form of objectivation that occurs as the social settings and experiences of religious groups and individuals are externalised: cosmisation. Cosmisation is the locating of objectivated ‘nomoi’ beyond the world, literally in the cosmos.<sup>56</sup> From an epistemological point of view, it is the identification of socially contingent knowledge with the entire universe, a sort of ultimate and hallowed reality. Berger believes that in this removal of socially constructed meaning from the immediate, social realm into the cosmos, one discovers the essence of religion itself. It is ‘the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant.’<sup>57</sup> This relates to, but is not entirely homogenous with, Davies’ ‘super-plausibility’ mentioned previously and invoked during Chapter Four’s discussion of group purpose as purveyors of secret knowledge. Here, we simply note that Davies is using the language of plausibility theory and is recognisably influenced by Berger’s thoughts. The concept of ‘super-plausibility’ is intended, however, to benefit the sociology of knowledge by illuminating the cosmisation or objectivation process more precisely as it relates to the religious adherents themselves. Accordingly, Davies offers an elucidation of his term: ‘Religions specialise in the double process of pinpointing the flaws in the human condition and positing modes of redress. And it is these affirmations that constitute schemes of super-plausibility’.<sup>58</sup> This is particularly pertinent for understanding and analysing religious conversion, but also supplements Berger’s thinking by explicitly commenting on the common occurrence wherein the sacred form of reality posited by religion supplants previously held knowledge. This superseding information may result from better explanations for alienating and marginalising experiences or may simply be a function of the holy descriptions attributed to the scheme, or both. Either way, the newly acquired worldview introduces what has been signally lacking thus far

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<sup>56</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 36-7.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>58</sup> Davies, *Anthropology & Theology*, 153.

in our discussion, the meaning derived by the individual from the objectivated 'nomoi'.

The final component of Berger's theory, however, is internalisation, and in this stage epistemology comes to the fore: 'The individual not only *learns* the objectivated meanings but identifies with and is shaped by them...He becomes not only one who possesses these meanings, but one who represents and expresses them' (emphasis added).<sup>59</sup> This is observable, Berger adds, in social roles. For example, a father or mother learns the objectivated social conventions and norms attached to these labels and, thus, not only comes to speak or think on what a father or mother does but also inhabits those characteristics and thinks of her or himself as a parent due to the capacity for reflecting such norms. Internalisation, then, with much admitted overlap in its relation to objectivation, is the conceptual gateway for issues of identity, individuality, and the phenomenological notions of 'actors' with subjective realities. That being the case, it is no deviation when Berger redirects his discussion to the role of the individual in the maintenance and preservation of legitimacy. The paramount reality of the collective and its constituents survives only in the presence of the dialectic between society and humanity; the 'moments' of which are externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation.

Thus, Berger reiterates the significance of internalisation, as that event in which society affects humanity, before fully immersing himself in the discussion of religion in particular:

The process of internalisation must always be understood as but one moment of the larger dialectic process that also includes the moments of externalisation and objectivation. If this is not done there emerges a picture of mechanistic determinism, in which the individual is produced by society as cause produces effect in nature. Such a picture distorts the societal phenomenon...The individual is not moulded as a passive, inert thing. Rather, he is formed in the course of a protracted conversation in which he is a *participant* (original emphasis).<sup>60</sup>

A few lines later, Berger explains that the individual must incessantly engage in this bilateral process in order for the objective and subjective 'knowledge' to continue its function of sustaining the individual and his or her group. In religion, the necessary plausibility structures needed for this sustenance are quite strong and unquestionably

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<sup>59</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 25.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 27-8.

effective. It is for this reason that Berger can seamlessly manoeuvre from internalisation to discussions of order and the explanatory value of religious cosmisation. In his estimation, the subjective reality acquired through internalisation becomes intertwined with and integral to the individual's own ordering of existence. In other words, experiences must adhere to and find relevance within the subjective 'knowledge' of the actor. If this does not occur, the personal sense of order or *nomos* must be altered or eschewed, a detail that is reiterated in Chapter Four as we illuminate the sense of order and purpose bestowed on religious adherents by the compelling idea of deification.

It is at this point in our treatment of the sociology of knowledge, then, that we must ask and look to answer an important question: What happens when personal experience and social reality come into conflict? Or, more precisely, what options are available when the socially-constructed world proves incapable of meeting the demands of social experience? Owing a great deal to Durkheim, Berger addresses this concern through the language of 'marginality' and 'anomie'.<sup>61</sup> The latter term was popularised by Durkheim in his sociological analysis of suicide, and perhaps Berger is tacitly indicating his affinity with this concept by choosing to use '*nomos*' and '*nomoi*' throughout his work.<sup>62</sup> The term *anomie* is a simple word of Greek origin; coming from *ἀνομία*, it is formed by adding the prefix 'a' to '*nomos*' (law) resulting in a term for the absence of law or order. In sociology, *anomie* typically refers to the loss of order or identity in the face of significant existential dilemmas or life changes.<sup>63</sup> Sharing this same perspective, Berger's basic assertion, and one that is arguably fundamental within the broader discipline of the sociology of religion, is that religious adherents minimise *anomie* by rooting reality in an ultimate, cosmological paradigm.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 31. Berger's examination of these matters begins in earnest at this point in his book, but the general concept of marginal experiences relating directly to religious plausibility carries throughout the remainder of the work.

<sup>62</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Sociological Study* (New York: The Free Press, 1951), 241. Durkheim dedicates an entire chapter to a certain type of suicide he believes to be the result of *anomie* or an incongruity between societal structures and an individual's unrestricted, insatiable desires. Without corresponding social restraints, inconsistency between society and the individual can cause anomic suicide.

<sup>63</sup> It is important to note that Hans Mol equates these two terms, order and identity. In his sociology of religion, identity is unfailingly grounded in order.

Such a notion is vastly significant for comprehending the theoretical intersection of Berger's sociology of knowledge and religious studies. For Berger, religions are subject to this threat from instability and disorder, but they are somewhat unique in that the looming threat also provides religious communities with their *raison d'être*. The universality of meaning offered by religion is socially constructed and legitimated because of its capacity to (and in order to) mollify the abrasive moments in human experience. No social institution is immune to penetrations of paramount reality, including religion; but religion, perhaps the purest form of the sociological phenomenon wherein social experience comes to be objectively and subjectively legitimated, is a ubiquitous and dexterous product of the dialectic espoused by Berger. What is more, religion provides an unparalleled glimpse into the constitutive processes of anomie and the integration of agonistic events into an interpretation of reality.

*Peter Berger and the Sociology of Knowledge: Summative Thoughts*

Berger's theories explore the phenomenological corollaries between individual and group experiences and the views of reality they come to possess. For this reason, he deserves mention not only in a summary of key thinkers in the sociology of knowledge but in a study specifically analysing the relationship between heresy as opposition and the belief systems of those religious groups opposed. That being said, Berger certainly did not escape the publication of his sociological theories unscathed. For instance, we can observe one common criticism in Nathan Grossman's statement that Berger placed 'the cart before the horse' in asserting that religious institutions essentially channel religious/ecstatic behaviour into socially acceptable patterns of conduct.<sup>64</sup> In contrast, Grossman believes that 'religious ecstasy...gives legitimacy to the pattern and objectives of personal conduct.' Of course, other more general criticisms were also offered by Berger's colleagues. Ninian Smart, writing contemporaneously with Berger and vehemently advocating religious studies as its own separate discipline, claimed of Berger's thoughts that 'there is hardly anything in his general theory which would make sense of the great variety of religious experience, institutions, and doctrines' in the world.<sup>65</sup> Of course, Berger had

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<sup>64</sup> Grossman, 291.

<sup>65</sup> Smart, 77.

ostensibly anticipated such an argument when he said, 'In any case, one cannot properly assume *a priori* that to understand the social roots of a particular religious idea is *ipso facto* to understand its later meaning or to be able to predict its later social consequences.'<sup>66</sup> Indeed, it may be a slight misunderstanding of the sociology of knowledge in general to infer that religious variety is left unexplained or worse, is explained as directly caused by some unilateral process of socialisation. As Berger himself often repeats, the dialectic must never be abandoned or ignored.

This is not to say, however, that Berger's theories present only cogent and unassailable truths. In stating what were essentially indirect attacks on the 'externalisation' thesis of Berger's theory, Smart and others pinpointed a noticeable weakness. Berger offers very little detail on the actual process by which social living comes to project or exude principles that can, subsequently, be objectivated. Additionally (and it is doubtful whether and to what extent Berger intended this), the articulation of externalisation seems to preclude other potential sources of religious belief such as individual imagination or newly-acquired, theoretical knowledge. For example, Joseph Smith could learn of the Hebrew word *Elohim* and its Biblical usage as a plural noun, and subsequently, develop a belief in a multitude of gods.<sup>67</sup> Smith also attempted to set up a sort of utopian experiment, The Law of Consecration, in which all members of the community relinquished their possessions to the church and then were allocated material goods based on need. Though there were contextual motivators and cultural influences affecting Smith's choices and teachings, it is noteworthy that both of these forms of religiosity, at least in their unique early-Mormon variety, seem primarily to have arisen in the mind of a single charismatic individual, Joseph Smith. Whilst the latter utopianism failed rather quickly, the former theological belief has enjoyed striking longevity. More to the point, such ideas and experiments remain unaccounted for by Berger's notion of externalisation.

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<sup>66</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 50.

<sup>67</sup> See, *Book of Abraham* 4:1, 'And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth.' This scriptural passage was first published in *Times and Seasons* 3.10 (1842). C.f., Kurt Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, 1833-1915* (London: McFarland & Co., 2000), 80. Widmer notes that Joseph Smith first encountered the Hebrew language in 1835 and began his work on the *Book of Abraham* that same year. Two years after the above passage was published, Smith's doctrine of eternal progression was published in *Times and Seasons* 5.15 (1844) and later became known as the 'King Follett Discourse'. In this way, it appears that his Hebrew education gradually influenced his theology.

From another angle, however, the failure of utopian ideals and the success of non-Trinitarian beliefs underscore one of Berger's most important contributions, the notion of plausibility structures. Joseph Smith's assertion that there was a 'plurality of gods' received social legitimation whilst his attempts to consolidate and distribute the community's property did not; the former quickly appeared not only possible but actual, whereas his effort to convince members that they ought to contribute all possessions to the betterment of the collective did not enjoy a great deal of social undergirding. Although it is likely that the reason for abandoning the latter was multifarious, an amalgam of social circumstances such as monetarily poor converts, outside persecutions, and internal conflicts, such a confluence undoubtedly amounted to a lack of social plausibility which proved ruinous.<sup>68</sup>

Berger's understanding of plausibility structures is, therefore, quite useful. Certainly, a social base is required for certain elements of information to transform into common 'knowledge' of reality. In order for certain religious systems and worldviews to subsist over time social legitimations are needed, and Berger does well to explain this in detail. Yet, the initial sources of information are as varied as the forms of religious expression noted by Smart. Perhaps, the diversity of the input, in some direct manner, affects the diversity of the output. This is a possible upshot to Davies' observation that cognitive research has called some sociological assertions into question by suggesting that the human brain has an innate propensity for organising information in categorical manners.<sup>69</sup> In this way, the variety of religiosities may result from individuals organising their interpretations of the world according to 'their grasp of what constitutes a human'. Further, it should be noted that geography, biology, diet, climate, to say nothing of ethnic diversity and pluralism, combine to form a sort of religious gestalt in each and every society.<sup>70</sup> Whilst the members of each community share many of these influences, it is unavoidably the case that conflicts will occur between individuals as well as between individual and group.

One weakness of Berger's theories is, then, the lack of detail concerning the role of the individual. In his early publications, as we have shown, the reader

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<sup>68</sup> Terryl Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 57.

<sup>69</sup> Davies, *Anthropology & Theology*, 154.

<sup>70</sup> Of course, many religious adherents would also include revelation as a source of initial information.

encounters considerable material on the processes of socialisation and internalisation, both admittedly focused on individuals, but little is said about religious adherents as they participate in the epistemological processes of the social group and the subjective significance appended to the meaning systems by each believer. As Davies says,

Identity also contributes a dynamic and emotional element to the sense of meaning and is an inevitable dimension to soteriological discourse. The sociology of knowledge itself tends to overemphasise rational components of meaning so benefits from an inclusion of the concept of identity which roots meaning in the individual.<sup>71</sup>

Concurring with Davies in closing this discussion of the sociology of knowledge, we now engage the words of another sociologist of religion, Hans Mol. In Mol, one notes an indebtedness to phenomenology and the sociology of knowledge lying beneath an overt venture into the very concepts overlooked by Mannheim, Schutz, and Berger.

### **Hans Mol's Adaptation/Identity Dialectic**

Throughout the present study, effort is exerted to 'get behind' the phenomena observed, to unearth not only possible initiators of deifying forms of soteriology but the epistemological and sociological processes comprising the earliest stages of religious movements. The goal is not to 'explain away' but to take an additional, conceptual step backwards in the chain of events which leads from experience to belief, from societal position to religious confession. One important step towards this end involves an exploration of Mol's sociological theory of religious identity.

Mol would agree with the statement from Davies listed above and, in some ways, diverges from the sociology of knowledge because the latter tends to ignore the role of the individual, at least as an emotive and imaginative being.<sup>72</sup> For Mol, identity is the ultimate concern of religion and of any general sociological theory applied to its analysis. Even so, he does seem to grant the sociology of knowledge a number of key insights.<sup>73</sup> For instance, Mol was cited earlier as avowing that 'there is

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<sup>71</sup> Davies, *Meaning and Salvation*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to note that Mol's doctoral work was supervised by Robert Merton, the author of perhaps the only substantial sociology of knowledge work published in the 1950s (see note 29, above).

<sup>73</sup> Mol also cites Gerardus van der Leeuw eight different times in *Identity and the Sacred*, always appealing to the phenomenologist for support. Here, then, is evidence for some degree of agreement between the phenomenological roots of the sociology of knowledge and Mol's own theories.



no such thing as uninterpreted reality.’<sup>74</sup> In this rather laconic proclamation, there is an implicit espousal of the same epistemological positions held by the sociologists mentioned above. Knowledge is socially-dependent; it has always, already received collective explanation and integration. Merely a few sentences later, Mol quotes Geertz who defines ‘religious patterns’ as ‘symbolic screens through which experience is interpreted’.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, in *Meaning and Place*, Mol adopts the language of ‘systems of meaning’ which he says are only good if they ‘never get caught’, for such systems ‘must be broad and relevant, so that experiences and events fit the traditional interpretations.’<sup>76</sup> This, he claims, is necessary for rendering disorder and anomie innocuous. Echoing Durkheim, Berger, and others, Mol states his presumption simply: ‘If the human muddle and mess can be related to order, then the muddle and mess are “relativised”’.<sup>77</sup> This language is recognisably entrenched in the idioms of both the sociology of religion and the sociology of knowledge.

Yet, this introduction of meaning systems is precisely the point of demarcation between Mol and those already discussed in this chapter. Drawing from a very wide range of source material, Mol proposes a view of religious identity that understands humanity as incessantly engaged in the development of symbol systems. These systems of meaning, however, are not simply the externalisations of social interaction; instead, meaning systems are in some sense an evolutionary advantage possessed by humans which allows for adaptation to changing circumstances.<sup>78</sup> Most significantly for Mol, symbol systems protect and anchor individual identity.

In addition to his fellow sociologists, Mol references ethologists, psychologists, and anthropologists in order to substantiate his assertions.<sup>79</sup> By utilising such a broad field, Mol is able to begin his presentation with a brief overview of both biological influences on identity and evolution as a conceptual frame for the study of religion. As regards the former, Mol is interested in the immune system as a

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<sup>74</sup> Mol, 68.

<sup>75</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 98.

<sup>76</sup> Hans Mol, *Meaning and Place* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983), 45.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>78</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Konrad Lorenz, Erik Erikson, Sigmund Freud, Clifford Geertz, and Bronislaw Malinowski, respectively.

parallel for religion as well as discussing animal aggression in relation to religious identity. Early in his work, he compares the process of ‘sacralisation’ to antibodies in the body.<sup>80</sup> His reference to the ethologist Konrad Lorenz is far from trifling, and supports the general argument rather effortlessly. Lorenz published an influential book on animal aggression in which he (inadvertently?) champions many of the sociology of knowledge precepts.<sup>81</sup> In Lorenz, Mol recognised an exponent of similar ideas concerning human nature. Indeed, the former discusses not only the biological tendency to defend social territory, but the functional benefit of aggression in maintaining social tension internally and externally.<sup>82</sup> Aggression, according to Lorenz, also tends to be transformed into ritualised forms. These ritualised behaviours channel the aggressive propensities into socially acceptable and facilitating modes. Concluding his chapter on the ritual of aggression, Lorenz says,

I have even stressed the other fact that everything which man by tradition venerates and reveres, does not represent an absolute ethical value, but is sacred only within the frame of reference of one particular culture...If social norms and customs did not develop their peculiar autonomous life and power, if they were not raised to sacred ends in themselves, there would be no trustworthy communication, no faith and no law.<sup>83</sup>

This, unequivocally, supports sociological assertions about the contextual dependence of knowledge and, as Mol realised, the persistent sacralisation of the socially-beneficial elements of culture. The latter observation connected to Lorenz’s recognition of the ritualisation of aggression in animals such as fish, birds, and primates, notes that these animals engaged in aggressive behaviours in order to maintain the ‘pecking order’, ensure a fair distribution of the same species over a limited resource field, and to defend the youngest members of the group.<sup>84</sup>

It was by theoretically linking both the immuno-biological with the ethological in this way that Mol arrived at his sociological theory of religion. Just as a fish may defend territory with physical aggression, so the white blood cells attack foreign intruders. In much the same way, humans seem to respond passionately and

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<sup>80</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 5.

<sup>81</sup> Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (London: Methuen, 1968).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-6.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-1.

<sup>84</sup> Lorenz, 34.

arduously to experiences perceived as threats to the social order or collective cohesion. Individual identity, then, is ‘the stable niche that man occupies in a potentially chaotic environment which he is therefore prepared vigorously to defend.’<sup>85</sup> Just as Durkheim discusses anomie and its relation to suicide and Berger discusses the ‘rupture’ of paramount reality by unexplained phenomena, Mol contributes to the topic by discussing the place of individual identity not only in the responsive behaviours of those individuals but in relation to the drive for meaning within human societies. Meaning systems are an evolutionary advantage: ‘Man’s creation of symbol systems facilitated man’s adaptation of changing circumstances quicker than is possible in species that rely on genetic and organic changes.’<sup>86</sup>

Mol, however, is not content with the sociological theories offered by his fellow observers of religion. Much like Berger and others, Mol prefers to discuss the sociology of religion in terms of a working dialectic, a model that he believes has not received due attention.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Mol criticises Durkheim, Evans-Pritchard, and Richard Fenn for working with a ‘strategically dysfunctional definition of religion’ (Fenn) and minimising the ‘integrative complement’ of the two components of the dialectic: differentiation and order (Durkheim and Evans-Pritchard).<sup>88</sup> Mol accepts the dualistic view of Durkheim, the delineation between sacred and profane, but is more concerned with the process of sacralisation (the making of the sacred) than with the sacred itself. Thus, Mol opens the first paragraph of his key work with his definition of religion as ‘the sacralisation of identity’, a description that entails both the dialectic between order (identity) and differentiation as well as a focus on sociological processes rather than categories.<sup>89</sup> In Mol’s view, this working definition is superior to Marxist perspectives in that the former includes natural elements such as individual commitment as emotional anchorage which do not receive emphasis in Marxism. Accordingly, the sacralisation of identity avoids the pitfall of denying

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<sup>85</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 65.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. Though he fails to mention Simmel in this regard, Mol lists Talcott Parsons, Clifford Geertz, Robert Bellah, and the ancient Chinese duality of Yin and Yang as other proponents of a dialectical approach to analysing religious phenomena.

<sup>88</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 4, 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

ritual, myth, and objectification, a mistake Mol believes was made by Rudolph Otto in his disproportionate emphasis on commitment.<sup>90</sup>

What is more, by connecting identity with both order and stability, Mol is able to define sacralisation as,

the process by means of which on the level of symbol-systems certain patterns acquire the same taken-for-granted, stable, eternal, quality which on the level of instinctive behaviour was acquired by the consolidation and stabilisation of new genetic materials.<sup>91</sup>

We might note here that this concept leaves open the possibility for sacralisation to occur in arenas not traditionally associated with religious institutions. This is no inadvertent outcome, for Mol subtly addresses the issue of secularisation by promulgating his definition of religion, one which is decidedly broad and does not by necessity exclude the potential for individuals to locate their identities in non-religious facets of society. Even so, Mol holds that ‘religious practices give special underpinning to particular conceptions of order within a culture, thus making the security of the individual less precarious.’<sup>92</sup> This conclusion is reached, at least in part, through Mol’s familiarity with aboriginal religion in the antipodes.<sup>93</sup> He adopts a sort of evolutionary perspective in his assertion that primitive belief systems (e.g., that of the Maori of New Zealand) tend to conflate order, spirituality, nature, and experience whereas more modern, western religions tend to be differentiated so as to adapt more effectively to changing circumstances.<sup>94</sup> For this reason, Mol would agree with Davies’ comment: ‘The processes that...produce self-identity underlie all aspects of life, though they often become most explicit in what we call religion.’<sup>95</sup> Davies offers this statement with regards to emotions, moods, and life values; yet, it is relevant here because, in some sense, the observation justifies Mol’s focus on traditional religions despite his intentionally broad definition. Furthermore, Davies

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>91</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>93</sup> See, *The Firm and the Formless: Religion and Identity in Aboriginal Australia* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982). Though this work was published after these comments, much of the research had already occurred during Mol’s employment at Australian National University.

<sup>94</sup> Mol, *Meaning and Place*, 22-3.

<sup>95</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *Emotion, Identity, and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

highlights the essential link between identity-producing processes and religion, another integral element of Mol's theory which defines religion in terms of the process of sacralisation acting on identity.

### **The Sacralisation of Identity**

The definition of sacralisation presented above, though it stands securely within the sociological trends stemming both from Durkheim and the phenomenologists, is merely an abstract sketch. Mol, recognising the fact, dedicates much of *Identity and the Sacred* to expounding and expanding this concept. First, however, he further articulates his understanding of dialectic. 'Security', he says, 'is bound up with order.'<sup>96</sup> Defining identity as 'a stable niche', Mol equates identity with the human drive for order and security. Accepting the sociological presupposition that humans and their societies exhibit undeniable yearnings for meaning, Mol, also influenced by biological studies, prefers to speak of meaning as a longing for wholeness, completion, and fixed points of reference. His dialectic, then, is a differentiation/identity dialectic, a dualistic relationship between humanity's innate drive for stability and the ever-changing experiences inhibiting that effort.

Mol chooses the dialectic model because he wishes to construct a widely useful theory of religion. Choosing the subtitle, *A sketch for a new social-scientific theory of religion*, Mol explains,

For a sociological theory bent on developing generalisations in which both past and present, primitive and modern are adequately accounted for, it is necessary to have a conceptual apparatus geared to both stability and change, to similarities and differences.<sup>97</sup>

The reasons for such a model having been established, Mol then describes the deep complementarity between identity and differentiation; the one both stimulating and countering the other. Too much order (if humans give themselves fully to their natural inclinations) can result in a religion incapable of effectively integrating forced changes. An excess of differentiation can, likewise, cause the destruction of order; Mol poignantly (and humorously) compares this possibility to 'too many prima donnas under one roof.'<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 8.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 9.

There is a necessary balance between these two potentialities.<sup>99</sup> Mol uses the aborigines of Tasmania as an example of too much order, or religious rigidity. As Europeans began to arrive in Tasmania, the *Lebenswelt* of the natives was threatened. Their religion, a comprehensive interpretation of reality, was wrecked. Just as steel increases both in rigidity and fragility as it is reheated, so there is a positive correlation between religious rigidity and what Mol calls ‘the fragile frame of identity’.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the native population of Tasmania was not prepared for the threat of a new, imposing race, and their rigid system ultimately proved ineffective for handling such a strain. Although this particular sort of fragility is less likely in more differentiated forms of religion (e.g., western iterations of Christianity), it is noteworthy that even the members of such groups tend to frame their experiences with agonistic outsiders in terms of ethnicity. At times, the threat to group solidarity and stability is identified as a racial threat even in the face of compelling evidence to the contrary.<sup>101</sup> Again, this is a result of inadequate, pre-existent means for dealing with change. Consequently, the maintenance and protection of identity necessitates a surrendering to the adaptive potential of the reified religious institution in which that identity has been grounded. Sacralisation is the means by which this balance is reached and identity is secured.

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<sup>99</sup> This will become very important in our study’s concluding discussion of ‘elasticity’.

<sup>100</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 55.

<sup>101</sup> For example, Mormons have been treated as a different ethnicity in numerous publications. For innocuous uses of ‘ethnicity’ in social-scientific studies of Mormonism: Joel Kotkin, *Tribes: How Race, Religion and Identity Determine Success in the Global Economy* (New York: Random House, 1993), 4-5; Thomas O’Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 116; and Armand L. Mauss, ‘Mormons as Ethnics: Variable Historical and International Implications of an Appealing Concept,’ *The Mormon Presence in Canada*, eds. Brigham Y. Card et al. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1990), 332-37. Other references to Mormons as a unique ethnicity are: Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 187; Patricia Limerick, ‘Peace Initiative: using the Mormons to Rethink Culture and Ethnicity in American History,’ *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), 240; Louis A. Moench, ‘Mormon forms of Psychopathology,’ *AMCAP Journal* (1985): 61-73; and Lester E. Bush, Jr., ‘A Peculiar People,’ *Dialogue* 12.3 (1979): 61-78. Bush highlights the nineteenth-century report by an American Army doctor, Roberts Bartholow, informing the United States Senate of the physiological characteristics of Mormons: Thomas Lawson, ed., *Statistical Report on the Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States, from January 1855 to January 1860* (Washington D.C., 1860), 301-02. Also, Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 7. Givens recounts the manner by which opponents of Mormonism in the nineteenth century were apt to frame their religious objections in terms of nativism, referring to Catholics as Irish and Mormons as a distinct race. Perhaps, religious groups were able to avoid awareness of their own belief system’s inadequacies by removing the debate from the arena of religion altogether.

### *Objectification*

In outlining his basic theory, Mol distinguishes four ‘mechanisms’ of the sacralisation process: objectification, commitment, ritual, and myth.<sup>102</sup> The first of these significantly resembles the objectivation of Berger’s theory. In fact, Mol describes this apparatus as ‘the projection of meaning and order into a transcendent point of reference where essences and archetypes of the mundane can be made to appear more orderly, consistent, and timeless.’<sup>103</sup> This description actually blends Berger’s objectivation with his understanding of cosmisation, and it owes its foundational assumptions to the general projectionist ideas included in the closing sections of the previous chapter. Mol asserts that objectification occurs when humans construct and apply symbol-systems within and to their environment. The postulation that these orderly schemes possess a certain transcendent value is inevitable. In this way, then, Mol seems to equate objectification with spiritualisation or (if he had not already defined it otherwise) sacralisation, the seemingly inadvertent extrapolation of meaningful social values into exogenous powers or notions of reality.

### *Commitment*

Again, Mol’s logical sequence strays only slightly from Berger’s. Recognising that the objectification of systems of meaning tends to participate in or act upon the lives of those individuals within the social collective Mol offers the next mechanism: Commitment. Unlike Berger’s ‘internalisation’, Mol’s notion of commitment entails both the potent influence of the objectified order as well as the individual emotions and behaviours of the ‘actors’. A number of important ideas coalesce in this understanding of religious commitment. Without question, Mol differs from other sociologists of religion in his application of commitment to the analysis of religious adherents. A brief example of this apparent difference is the manner in which Rodney Stark and his colleagues have typically defined religious commitment. In *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment*, Stark and Charles Glock essentially connect commitment with ‘religiousness’ and envision it as including five ‘dimensions’: belief, practice, knowledge, experience, and

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<sup>102</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 11. A brief introduction to these concepts begins here, but much of the remainder of our study is dedicated to their explication, explicitly and implicitly.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 214.

consequences.<sup>104</sup> Two decades later, Stark outlined his general theory of religion with William Bainbridge and kept to the same understanding of commitment intimated above. For all intents and purposes, religious commitment was equated with religious participation.<sup>105</sup> For Mol, writing contemporaneously with all three of these social scientists, this was insufficient.

Commitment, for him, is irrevocably intertwined with identity. In Mol's view, identity is fragile, as mentioned above, and needs both protection and conservation. Mol says that individuals tend to wrap their identities in "'don't touch' sentiments".<sup>106</sup> Those belief systems, as objectified symbol-systems, which are able to provide for the preservation of meaningful stability, are guarded similarly. Davies also highlights this human proclivity: 'Yet, even theologically speaking, people do have a capacity, perhaps even a tendency, to place above all contradiction those persons, places, and beliefs that have given them some special sense of purpose and existence.'<sup>107</sup> Thus, Mol believes that this emotional attachment to the objectified scheme *is* commitment; it is 'an anchoring of the emotions in a salient system of meaning, social, group, or personal, whether abstract or concrete.'<sup>108</sup> Commitment is not restricted to religious *praxis*, as Stark and Glock seem to argue. Furthermore, Mol's understanding of commitment encompasses more than individual emotions; it is tied to group and individual identity as well as the notion of 'foci of identity'. Mol believes that, as social beings, humans tend to focus their identities by various means and in multiple locations. This argument seems to rely on the observation that humanity endures the incessant mercuriality of existence and attempts to match the differentiation of culture and social reality with a sort of identity complex, seeking a broad footing against the shifting antagonisms of mundane life.

It is important to comprehend the degree to which Mol emphasises both the individual and the collective, the abstract and the concrete. With this scope in mind,

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<sup>104</sup> Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 14.

<sup>105</sup> Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, Toronto Studies in Religion, vol. 2, ed. Donald Wiebe (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 42, 47, 51-3.

<sup>106</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 55.

<sup>107</sup> Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, 152.

<sup>108</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 216.



he expresses the relationship of identity and commitment to charisma and conversion. Charisma refers to the process, at the collective level, whereby change is integrated and incorporated into a new identity.<sup>109</sup> The charismatic leader is able to reconstruct group identity after change led to marginality. This mimics the process of personal conversion which consists of the shedding of an old identity and an 'attachment to the new focus of identity'.<sup>110</sup> Of course, this new focus of identity may be the tangible geniality, thus confidence-bolstering influence, of a group's leader or it may be the abstract soteriology that ostensibly stabilises and interprets existence. In either case, the conserved or newly focused identity is in need of forced adaptation, but only to a limited extent.

### *Ritual*

Mol deviates from the sociology of knowledge again when he asserts that what matters most is not the presence or absence of conscious awareness but the issue of defending the 'boundaries' of a group or individual's identity. This goal is at least partially achieved through the third component of the sacralisation process - namely, the presence of ritual. If the inclusion of commitment allowed Mol to address the emotional aspect of religion, the personal conviction and defensive loyalty of group members to the stable identity on offer; the notion of ritual permits Mol to engage concepts of embodiment, *habitus*, and the instruments available for the execution of commitment compulsions. By ritual, Mol intends the 'repetitive enactment of human systems of meaning.'<sup>111</sup> He agrees with the remark by sociologist Talcott Parsons that ritual is 'one of the fundamental defence mechanisms of society against the tendency to anomie.'<sup>112</sup> Rituals reinforce and refocus identities. Significant overlap exists between ritual and the other integral sacralising devices. For instance, the possibility of participation in rites offers the adherent an outlet for commitment. Likewise, the desire to maintain stability impels the group and its members to constantly 'act out' the sacred identity, resulting in rituals that effectively extend the collective memory of

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>111</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 233.

<sup>112</sup> Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1949), 713.

the group and, in so doing, legitimate the objectified version of reality often articulated in terms of theology or mythology. In close relation to this, is the interplay between commitment and ritual with regards to identity. In establishing identity, whether through conversion or charisma, ritual can involve recurrent detachment and attachment of emotions; this process only proving successful if the attached emotions are accompanied by a renewed commitment. Mol observes, however, that although commitment is always a constituent of ritual, the reverse is not the case. Consequently, Mol delineates between ritual and commitment according to whether or not these are 'rational actions'. The latter may be so, but ritual is overtly an act of emotion; it is involved in 'arousing the sentiments'.<sup>113</sup>

### *Myth*

Influenced by historian of religion Mircea Eliade, Mol considers myths to have a signal role in both the interpretation of reality and the sacralisation of experiences for a group.<sup>114</sup> Mol eloquently and succinctly states that myths 'provide the fitting contour for existence.' Later in this chapter, and corroborated by concrete examples in the fourth chapter, this assertion concerning the social function of myths will be championed in connection with soteriologies. The present study holds that, among second-century Christians and early Mormons, Mol's dialectical theory is exemplified in the existence of soteriological schemas, interpretive constructs which integrate individual/collective experience (heresy in the form of opposition) within an unreceptive society into a cohesive, motivating plan for the religious community. Though it is not all that is intended, these schemas certainly include myth and narrative. Mol promulgates a view of myth that obviates discussion of its characteristic form (i.e., narrative, iterative, philosophical, or otherwise). What seems most important is the symbolic quality of myths; their interpretations of reality are relayed as symbol-systems: 'A myth, then, is the synthesis, or crystallisation, as Lévi-Strauss calls it, of diverse cultural elements around a suitable symbolic core.'<sup>115</sup>

The differentiation/identity dialectic is never a distant thought for Mol. In his exposure of myth as a sacralising tool, Mol presents a lengthy, albeit compelling,

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<sup>113</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 244.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 246; Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism* (New York: Pantheon, 1964), xviii.

<sup>115</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 252.

gloss on the good company he shares in positing the idea that symbol-systems tend to reflect a complementary duality between order and disorder. Space does not permit a due engagement with this portion of his work, but it is instructive simply to list the sources used by Mol for support of his juxtaposition between differentiation and stability: the Bible, Confucius, Durkheim, Goethe, Hegel, Husserl, William James, Lévi-Strauss, Plato, and Weber.<sup>116</sup>

One example of such a dichotomy is that between sin and salvation. This illustration not only allows Mol to narrow his focus to Western, Christian forms of religion but also permits an examination of the ways in which the differentiation of culture parallels the increasing complexity of religious myths. Endeavouring to compose a general theory of religion, equally valid for primitive and modern religious systems, Mol must address the observable trajectory of the relationship between the human and his environment. In primitive societies, the counterpart to the social stability sought in culture was the unpredictability of nature. However, as scientific and technological progress produced an individual more adroit at subduing and manipulating his environs, the conflict of order and adaptation relocated to the stage of culture alone.<sup>117</sup> Here, in the modern forms of religion, one encounters an oscillation between various constitutive facets of social life. This dissonance engenders such theological ideas as sin and salvation, the regenerate and the unregenerate.

The belief systems attached to myths, therefore, must neutralise the deleterious potential of the inherent instability of society. They must possess ‘durability’.<sup>118</sup> Those myths capable of achieving and maintaining an effective degree of this durability may actually benefit from the challenge. This is Davies’ point when he states that the explanatory power of soteriology is based on the diversity of the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 247-49. The reader may immediately recognise the connection with a number of these thinkers. For instance, Lévi-Strauss is known in the social science community for initiating the Structuralist school of thought which held *a priori* that the true meaning of myths lies below the surface in the form of multiple binary oppositions. Similarly, Hegelian philosophy is often recognisable due to its postulation of both an original thesis and the subsequent presence of its antithesis. Of course Confucius propagated the antithetical powers of Yin and Yang, underlying all of existence.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>118</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 252.

cultures out of which it arises.<sup>119</sup> Integration of discordant experience is the *raison d'être* of myth. As a result, it is perpetually changing in composition as it comes into contact with novel experiences, cultures, locations, etc. Over time, the value of the myth is its aptitude at resolving the irresolvable through emotionally anchoring identity in an explication of the binary oppositions of the human experience. In other words, myths acknowledge the opposed forces of existence and achieve meaning by rendering this opposition simultaneously harmless and meaningful. Just as ritual steadies the emotions through repetitious re-involvement in consolidating order, so 'myth sacralises by recurrent narration.'<sup>120</sup> This is, to a great extent, the overlap of these two mechanisms of sacralisation; both reiterate the sacred identity, one through conceptualisation, the other through somatic involvement.<sup>121</sup>

### **Critique and Application**

Our chapter began with a binary focus, suggesting that the process which leads from the experience of heresy to the profession of belief could only be understood after exploring the epistemological process whereby groups come to share a perception of reality, both processes deserving equal analysis. This was, and is, expressed somewhat axiomatically, for religious adherents could not have their realities shaken by oppositional experiences if they did not have a reality from the start. Believing that humans are naturally social animals, we also believe that those perceptions of reality are inescapably dependent on shared understandings and interpretations of experience made plausible through incessant social reinforcement.

Thus, it has been necessary to elucidate the fundamental assumptions and conclusions informing this study before proceeding with the specific examples of the heretical process at work in the nascent stages of Christianity and Mormonism. It is for this purpose that the above review of Mol's theory is included. Although considerable space was dedicated to the endeavour, it is because the portions of the study that follow rely heavily on a number of specific insights offered by Mol that we have grappled with his overall approach in its entirety, coming to terms with its intricacies, strengths, and weaknesses. That being accomplished, we can now more

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<sup>119</sup> Davies, *Meaning and Salvation*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 260.

<sup>121</sup> This complement is readily apparent in the theological concepts of orthodoxy and orthopraxy; correct concepts and correct practices, respectively.

precisely address the utility of his thought for the study at hand with a special eye for the arguable superiority of his theories over those of Berger.

### *Identity*

One of the most significant elements of Mol's definition of religion is its incorporation of the concept of identity, not simply its inclusion but its proposed definition of identity. Mol is not, for example, content with the type of identity envisaged by sociologist Orrin Klapp:

...a functioning system of three variables: 1) what a person thinks about himself introspectively, 2) what he projects or sees imaged or accepted in the eyes of others (his social identity); and 3) his feelings validated when 'real to me' and when shared with others.<sup>122</sup>

This sort of three-fold definition is still popular among scholars of religion,<sup>123</sup> yet Mol believes that it ignores the context within which such self-definition can occur. Instead, Mol takes identity to mean 'units of social organisation'.<sup>124</sup> This, though a bit abstruse, obtains a degree of cogency once placed within Mol's dialectic. Not only is Mol interested in accounting for both individual and group identities, conspicuously espousing the Durkheimian view of humans as *Homo duplex*, but he also always interprets identity through the lens of a complementary dualism between differentiation (adaptation) and order.

If religion is socially constructed as Berger and others suggest, it necessarily involves individuals who contribute to its plausibility structure by grounding their identities therein. Religion is the 'sacralisation of identity' because it is the process of resolving discordance between social units (identities). Mol does not supplant Berger but, instead, supplements Berger by arguing that these identities may exist in conflict with one another, meaning that religion is not solely the attempt to resolve anomie by positing a transcendent, objective explanation but entails the erection of a stable haven in which anomie and other identity conflicts can find stability. This is a social process to be sure, but Mol is careful to highlight that it rests on more than the

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<sup>122</sup> Orrin E. Klapp, *Collective Search for Identity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 39.

<sup>123</sup> See, Davies, *Emotion, Identity, and Religion*, 2. Writing in the twenty-first century, Davies suggests a very similar definition: 'the intersection point of self-understanding, of the views others have of us, and of a society's preferred values and associated emotions.'

<sup>124</sup> Hans Mol, *The Faith of Australians*, Studies in Society, vol. 25, ed. Ronald Wild (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 217.

externalisation of the outcomes of social living, also entailing an emotional grounding aimed at resisting the perpetual oscillation between adaptation and stability. In bringing emotion, adaptability, and identity into the discussion, Mol moves beyond relatively restrictive deterministic tendencies seen in theorists such as Berger and allows room for the analysis of religious innovation and creativity, an important advantage of Mol's thoughts for our own study of deification in relation to existential crises faced by remarkably resourceful religious leaders. Using Mol's theory, for example, it is possible to predict some degree of theological creativity as communities are motivated to maintain identity through adaptability, the latter abetted by a strong sense of emotional commitment.

### *Emotion and Ritual*

In some ways Mol was ahead of his time in that he included emotions in his general theory of religion. As has been shown, this was partly a function of his reading of Lorenz, a zoologist who claimed that animal aggression served multifarious purposes for groups of species, both internally and externally. Mol recognised that any discussion of identity in general and religious identity in particular, required an acknowledgement of human affect. Asserting that emotions contribute to stability by conducting focus, commitment, and impulse; Mol underscored the importance of individual action and the intensity that attaches itself to humanity's valued alcoves of meaning.

Although one of Mol's objectives is to correct what he sees as shortcomings in the work of his contemporaries, he avoids discarding 'the baby with the bathwater'. His elucidation of the place of ritual within the system not only relates that concept to emotions but is also in harmony with ideas presented by Berger just a few years later. In order to comprehend the value of Mol's model, it may be beneficial to explain Berger's views on ritual and tradition. Berger, over the course of many pages, establishes an essential link between tradition, ritual, and collective memory.<sup>125</sup> Traditions, and their accompanying rituals, allow religious groups to continually reiterate and relive supernatural occurrences. Expressed alternatively, past moments of ecstasy or divine intervention are preserved in tradition; these experiences are then made available to all members, regardless of place or position. More importantly,

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<sup>125</sup> Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, 32-65.

these traditions and rituals create a meaningful longevity and continuity within the religious institution, resulting in a collective cluster of legitimated memories and transcendent signifiers without the need for recurring signs and wonders.

As we persist in our objective both to analyse heresy as a sociological process and investigate its workings within two disparate religious traditions, it is advantageous to reflect on this conceptualisation of ritual, its attendant emotions, and collective memory. It may initially appear facile to stress the direct connection between ritual and emotion, given that the former often pursues specific forms of the latter; however, there is more to this phenomenon; rituals benefit the community through numerous means. For instance, they allow for participation, facilitating and producing solidarity and socialisation. Additionally, rituals indicate what Davies calls a religious community's 'preferred emotions' and serve as something of a litmus test for the social compatibility of member to group.<sup>126</sup> To this idea of a collectivity's preferred emotions, we might justifiably add the notion of 'preserved emotions'. Just as groups tend to repeat and retain their preferred emotions, so their rites ensure lasting influence over the emotions inherited by succeeding generations.

This is something of the message intended by Berger in addressing the social function of religious traditions; however, as rites preserve the preferred, they *ipso facto* supply degrees of temporal continuity, or collective memory. Religions are not only involved in the sacralisation of present identities or more precisely, the present sacralisation of identities; they benefit from sacralising identities into the firm foundation of historical security, the meaningful memory of the sacred. Similar observations have come from a variety of disciplines. New Testament scholar Judith Lieu offers one of the most incisive remarks on the topic when she expounds the reflections of historian John Gillis:

The relationship between who we are and the past we tell is a reciprocal one and is rarely static: as John Gillis remarks, 'The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.' Thus, 'remembering' creates a history that provides a coherent continuity out of the discontinuities of all human experience; it not only explains the present but justifies it.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Davies, *Emotion, Identity, and Religion*, 37. Davies introduces his concept of 'preferred emotions' as those highly valued by a group and enabled by their chosen, rehearsed rites.

<sup>127</sup> John Gillis, 'Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,' *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3. Judith Lieu,

Likewise, historian Elizabeth Castelli directs congruent remarks at the concept of Christian martyrdom as it is imagined by those within the ranks. Her conclusion is that feelings of marginality find purpose in the ongoing construction of a ‘collectively livable[sic] story’ brought about by the interminable narration of past persecutions.<sup>128</sup> This phenomenon, again, relies on an awareness of embodiment in the perpetuation of group identity through ritual and corresponding emotions; this coalesces into a sort of animate memory.

These observations are integral for the present intention of discovering the effects of heresy on the perceptions and beliefs of a religious group. The life of a religious movement may, at times, depend on the efficacy of such efforts. For example, a Christian continuity of belief can be seen in such statements as Hebrews 13:8, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.’ Such confessions effectively demonstrate the overlap and intersection of Mol’s concepts: objectification, commitment, ritual, and myth. In addition, it betrays a degree of conscious-awareness among the adherents, at least at the collective level; the religious community propagates a shared interpretation of reality, including its past, present, and future.

Some sociologists, such as Eileen Barker, have observed the changes that occur over time within religious movements, noting that new religious movements tend to deviate away from a Weberian ideal type (charismatic leader-led group) as they encounter changes internally and externally.<sup>129</sup> The change, it is claimed, always progresses toward further assimilation with, and accommodation of, the surrounding culture.<sup>130</sup> Though it is agreed that ‘factors associated with the passage of time...do dictate *that* a movement will change’ (original emphasis),<sup>131</sup> this may not always manifest as greater assimilation. In fact, religious studies scholar Stephen Taysom argues that, in the case of Mormonism, a particular pattern reemerges time and again in

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*Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 62.

<sup>128</sup> Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>129</sup> Eileen Barker, ‘Plus ça change,’ *Social Compass* 42 (1995): 165, 172.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.



which external pressure does force a form of accommodation. This accommodation, however, is not unalloyed; it entails the reconstitution of those ‘boundaries that are dissolved’.<sup>132</sup> Taysom is responding to the conventional vision of Mormon history that sees the church’s 1890 manifesto banning polygamy as a pivotal moment signifying a new accommodating response to outside influence.

Taysom offers a much needed correction to the scholarly engagement with Mormon history, but Barker’s observations are not altogether invalid for our purposes. In the same article mentioned above, she highlights the process whereby a new religious movement instigates and sanctions its own internal changes in order to expand geographically and socially. The results of such changes may include new ‘interpretations’ and ‘influences’ as converts are welcomed from a variety of cultures.<sup>133</sup> This, Barker asserts, is necessary for the achievement of balance in the demographic distribution of the group, a balance needed to achieve longevity and viability. In an indirect, and admittedly inadvertent, manner, Barker supports one of Mol’s most valuable contributions: the adaptability/stability dialectic.

### *Restoring the Balance*

As indicated in the previous chapter, Rodney Stark includes ‘a medium level of tension with the surrounding environment’ as one necessary trait for successful religious movements. Another sociologist, Lorne Dawson, similarly states,

If strictness contributes to the competitive edge of a group, then accommodation may harm it. But accommodation to the dominant society

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<sup>132</sup> Stephen C. Taysom, “‘There is Always a Way of Escape’: Continuity and Reconstitution in Nineteenth-Century Mormon Boundary Maintenance Strategies,’ *Western Historical Quarterly* 37 (2006): 184; Seth D. Kunin, *We Think What We Eat: Neo-Structuralist Analysis of Israelite Food Rules and Other Cultural and Textual Practices* (London: Clark, 2004), 143-6; and Seth D. Kunin, ‘The Death/Rebirth Mytheme in the Book of Mormon,’ *Mormon Identities in Transition*, ed. Douglas Davies (London: Cassell, 1996), 192-203. Seth Kunin’s application of Neo-Structuralism to the Book of Mormon as well as Mormon spirituality is noteworthy alongside our citation of Taysom, for Kunin also explores patterns (this time, of a structural variety) within Mormonism. For example, just as Taysom seems to conclude that the Mormon case is a bit more complex than simple accommodation to society when historical patterns are analysed, so Kunin highlights that Mormonism presents a triadic rather than the more common dyadic structure in its remerging categorical patterns. A particularly relevant example for our study may be Kunin’s recognition of the Book of Mormon pattern of classifying individuals as non-chosen, chosen, or chosen with the divine lineage, important distinctions when viewed through the lens of their nineteenth-century milieu as we will see in the next chapter.

<sup>133</sup> Barker, 168.

seems advantageous in other ways. Success hinges on sustaining a delicate balance of these elements in the face of known and unknown contingencies.<sup>134</sup>

Stark and Dawson arrive at this conclusion through a different set of premises than Mol; nevertheless, there is obvious agreement. Religious groups function optimally when they are not acutely rigid or exceedingly flexible. This is the reason for Mol's dialectic. Mol prefers the differentiation/identity dialectic; yet, heuristic value increases if it is termed the adaptability/stability dialectic. This emphasises the contrariety and complementarity between culture's imposition of adaptation and the human drive for sure footing. Berger and others within the sociology of knowledge framework do address the social function of religion once the life-world has been negatively affected; however, they rarely illuminate the process comprising this resolution of anomie. Mol is successful in this endeavour. His vision of constant play between forces of differentiation and demands for order poignantly points to the consequent role of religion in society. Religion does more than provide meaning; it integrates the extremes of life. Whereas Berger positions chaos in opposition to the sacred,<sup>135</sup> Mol places chaos in opposition to order and proposes 'the sacred' as that which balances the two.

Mol's notion of sacralisation resembles Berger's concept of 'cosmisation'. That being said, Mol disagrees with Berger's definition of religion as 'the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant.'<sup>136</sup> Religion is, instead, the 'sacralisation of identity'. It certainly encompasses the process of 'cosmisation' but also acknowledges the importance of various foci, perhaps we might even say loci of identity. The individual locates his or her identity in the posited nomos of religion through commitment, ritual, objectification, and myth. Religion is not the attempt to understand the cosmos as significantly ordered, it is the process by which individuals and groups come to believe and participate in that ordered scheme in such a way that their identity shares the sacred status of the cosmological conception itself.

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<sup>134</sup> Lorne L. Dawson, 'New Religious Movements,' *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 381.

<sup>135</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 36.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

However, Mol arguably muddies the waters with his use of biological metaphors. For instance, the human immune system consists of white blood cells that respond to intrusion by destroying the invader whilst religions do not always act in a solely responsive manner that categorises experiences as ‘harmful’ or ‘familiar’.<sup>137</sup> Mol does address this in his conclusion. There, he compares the sacralisation process to the behaviour of an oyster; it ‘adjusts itself to the intruding grain of sand by coating it with nacre’.<sup>138</sup> This is a little more suitable even if religion is still seen as reactionary, always compelled to adapt to changing circumstances. Braj Sinha offered a similar observation concerning Mol’s model in the essay, ‘Ways of Yoga and the Mechanisms of Sacralisation’.<sup>139</sup> Applying the identity theory to the various forms of Yoga within the Hindu tradition, Sinha resolves what he perceives as Mol’s short-sightedness by postulating a fifth mechanism of sacralisation, viz., appropriation.<sup>140</sup> Appropriation is the means by which the sacralised thought-forms and social units continue to interact with everyday life, ensuring the future success of the sacralising process and the religious group itself. Although we suggest a different vantage and a correspondingly different terminology, Sinha’s basic critique is both incisive and instructive. Even though an identity has become sacred, it must continually remain permeable from both the transcendent side and the mundane side.

In the following pages, this tension between adaptability on the one hand and stability on the other is to be understood as a form of elasticity or malleability. Embracing Sinha’s critique, we utilise Mol’s dialectic to inform our analysis of heresy and its relationship to developing theological notions not only by directing our attention to the instability and corresponding fragility of identity caused by opposition to a religious community but also by suggesting a form of ‘survival of the fittest’. Religious institutions must ensure a degree of flexibility early in their development as a movement in order to maximise their future potential and adapt successfully by appropriating that which was sacralised. From a theoretical perspective the heretical process, or the method by which agonism stimulates fresh articulation of belief,

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<sup>137</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 5.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>139</sup> Braj and Manju Sinha, ‘Ways of Yoga and the Mechanisms of Sacralization,’ *Identity and Religion: International, Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Hans Mol (Beverly Hills: SAGE, 1978).

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

results in a more perfectly balanced belief system capable of incorporating and explaining changes whilst protecting group cohesion. If new religious movements hope to survive in the face of opposition, they must recognise the threats to their identity and allow such threats to shape their doctrines, a social process to which we now turn our attention.

### **When Position becomes Confession**

The following sketch of social heresy and its potentially constructive consequences for religious groups facing opposition is presented with some reservation; for, though it is not the author's intention, it may be read as various stages in a sequential process instead of the constituent, overlapping parts of a social phenomenon. For this reason, the heretical process may alternatively be described as the heretical *event*. Some historical examples may exhibit consecutive, distinct stages but the two illustrative groups analysed in the next two chapters present what may be a more typical case in which heresy appears as an almost simultaneous confluence of component occurrences. Indeed, the mechanisms of the process delineated below are separated somewhat artificially so that we may analyse them more effectively in our conceptual sketch of the process at the root of the apparent affinity between religious groups facing overt social opposition and soteriological schemas entailing deification.

Based on the preceding assumptions and conclusions of the sociologists of knowledge as well as Mol's dialectic, it is taken as something of a basic principle that social circumstances greatly influence religious beliefs, even if this argument is rather easily overstated. Much of the criticism Peter Berger has received, for instance, goes back to this (mis)interpretation of his work. He is understood as claiming that religions and their belief systems are entirely constructed by humans, and that the process is both inevitable and inadvertent, a flirtation with utterly deterministic views. This is, of course, not far from Durkheim's understanding of the way in which religion simply reflects society, the former existing as an elementary 'given' of social living.

Furthermore, as we mentioned above, these ideas lack an account of the imaginative and creative capacity of individuals. Even so, the basic sociological contention that context gives rise to religious particularity remains valuable for religious studies and is embraced in our study for its utility in understanding the professions uttered by persecuted religions. The heretical process, then, involves a

constellation of events that leads from a religious group's social position to their theological confession. There has been some debate about the relative value of social conflict.<sup>141</sup> Some, like Bruce, believe that social conflict can be rather easily dismissed if the challenged group can compose an explanatory theory for why they are superior. He does, however, admit that this solution requires social plausibility; if it lacks common acceptance, it may fully dissolve and leave the threat intact.<sup>142</sup> Many methodological options are available for acknowledging the potentially detrimental effect of conflict; however, it is Mol's dialectic between adaptability and stability that will be put to such uses in our study. In his view, too much adaptability or too much rigidity can result in the breakdown of the religious group; therefore, the heretical process as we envision it is the set of actions on the part of the persecuted group aimed at identifying and disarming heresy in order to maintain a harmonious balance between stability and change.

In the following pages, then, conflict is understood as unquestionably containing the purest potential for positive reconstitutions of belief and identity when it occurs within religious contexts. This is because conflict, opposition, anomie, and any other social force associated with the volatile fault lines of social life have historically left indelible imprints on the religious sentiments and expressions of those involved. If religion functions as the great framer of the inexplicable, then confounding moments unlock the power of religion. This does not imply, however, that social conflict (as a category of such moments) unfailingly produces positive outcomes for each and every religious group. What is argued is that such events are densely pregnant with constructive potential, almost begging the religious community to engage in healthy stretches of their boundaries and beliefs. Philip Mellor asserts of Durkheim that he 'does not suggest that the *capacity* to believe is socially constituted, only that the *nature* of beliefs is shaped by social relationships...' (original emphasis).<sup>143</sup> Durkheim's position, then, is closely related to our own.

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<sup>141</sup> Coser, 151-57. Coser's concluding chapter provides a valuable summary of the various ways in which internal and external conflict can be both injurious and beneficial to social groups. It should be remembered that he is presenting these findings in response to Simmel.

<sup>142</sup> Bruce, 20.

<sup>143</sup> Philip A. Mellor, 'Religion as an Elementary Aspect of Society: Durkheim's Legacy for Social Theory,' *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, eds. James A. Beckford and John Wallis (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 13.

Indeed, we understand the process of heresy as the convergence of three distinct social phenomena: reception, recognition, and resolution. This threefold model is not without justification, for it not only owes something to the socialisation theory of Berger (externalisation-objectivation-internalisation) but also stands in the good company of more recent scholars like Taysom and Jörg Stolz.<sup>144</sup> Stolz defines a ‘sociological explanation’ of a phenomenon as an explanation that shows ‘how an initial situation (macro) leads individuals to react to this situation (micro) and how, through aggregation, these individual reactions combine to form a new social outcome (macro).’<sup>145</sup> This basic sociological pattern is observable in the heretical event in which agonism is experienced (reception), the in-group reacts with varying degrees of progress from confusion to ardour (recognition), and then the opposition is integrated into their beliefs as one method for mollification (resolution). Regarding Mormonism specifically, this is strikingly akin to Taysom’s claim that the nineteenth-century history of the Latter-day Saints presents a pattern of responses to opposition which consists of three phases: ‘the assertion of an ideal, external pressure met with internal resistance, and finally, external pressure met with internal accommodation.’<sup>146</sup> Taysom’s final two phases are relatively indistinguishable from those of ‘recognition’ and ‘resolution’. However, the first phase (asserting an ideal) is taken for granted in the heretical model; the ideal represents the social position and religious professions opposed by outsiders. Again, it is also important to remember that, in contradistinction with Taysom’s notion, the process of heresy is not so much composed of ‘phases’ as it is with overlapping events or episodes. It may be helpful to conceptualise the relationship between the three episodes as somewhat analogous to, although far from perfectly parallel with, that between emotions and moods. If emotions are the immediate, initial, and ephemeral responses and moods are the

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<sup>144</sup> It should also be said that the author is indebted to the German philosopher Hegel for his notion of ‘dialectic’ as well as to the anthropologist Marcel Mauss for his three-fold concept of gift exchange. Both theories suggest that there is an initial event, a response, and a third act which serves to resolve the entire process. In addition, Hegel’s ideas found their way into the ponderings of the theologian Karl Barth who, in turn, influenced Mol; the latter then composing his dialectical theory of identity explicated above.

<sup>145</sup> Jörg Stolz, “‘All Things Are Possible’: Towards a Sociological Explanation of Pentecostal Miracles and Healings,” *Sociology of Religion* 72.4 (2011): 460.

<sup>146</sup> Taysom, ‘There is Always a Way of Escape,’ 184.

consequent, lasting orientations;<sup>147</sup> ‘reception’ corresponds to the former, ‘resolution’ to the latter, with ‘recognition’ bridging the two through an increase of conscious awareness.

## **Reception**

In 2004, philosopher John Gray published a book entitled, *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions*.<sup>148</sup> This collection of independent reflections on the state of politics and society takes its name from Gray’s assertion that he has chosen to adopt dissenting, non-conformist positions on key issues. His underlying view is that heresy involves the conscious exercise of one’s volition; to be heretical is to choose an unpopular position in relation to some orthodoxy. Though Gray’s publication stands outside of the scope and subject of the present study, his choice of title directs our attention to an important issue regarding heresy and religious conflict: Is it all a matter of conscious choice?

If one episode in the heretical process involves the reception of opposition, and reception often connotes a degree of passivity, it is with considerable justification that we ask the above question. Just as we noted the relativity behind designations of ‘heresy’ and ‘orthodoxy’ in the previous chapter, so here the perception of a group or individual is important. What one group believes to be the innocent, passive toleration of opposition, another group understands to be the assertive and wily implementation of rhetoric and strategy. Once again, heresy is ultimately a matter of perspective, and our decision to discuss experiences of opposition in terms of receiving heresy is an intentional decision to highlight the presence of what we will frequently call a martyrdom mentality, a state of mind characterised by an insistence on in-group innocence (thus, moral superiority) and out-group culpability combined with intense concern for the future perpetuation of a narrative in which this innocence is a central focus.

Such competing perspectives are encountered in Mormon Studies, for example, in the somewhat contradictory claims of R. Laurence Moore and Terryl

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<sup>147</sup> Davies, *Emotion, Identity, and Religion*, 2. Davies refers to ‘quickly passing emotions’ and ‘enduring moods’.

<sup>148</sup> John Gray, *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions* (London: Granta Books, 2004).

Givens. The former describes the difficulties in arriving at the ‘objective’ truth of the historical record concerning Mormonism and offers a possible conclusion:

Mormons were different because they said they were different and because their claims, frequently advanced in the most obnoxious way possible, prompted others to agree and to treat them as such. The notion of Mormon difference, that is, was a deliberate invention elaborated over time. It was both cause and result of a conflict in which all parties discovered reasons to stress not what Mormons had in common with other Americans, which was a great deal, but what they did not have in common.<sup>149</sup>

Yet, Terryl Givens believes that Mormons did not exaggerate in their accounts of the tempestuous record with Americans and the American government; instead, Givens interprets the recurring theme of persecution in Mormon history as ‘emphasising’ what was already an accurate telling of real events.<sup>150</sup> He does acknowledge that this emphasis strengthened solidarity among the Mormons and concedes that the Mormon record includes ‘a vocabulary of exclusion’ that would prove incendiary in their relations with outsiders.<sup>151</sup>

As this example illustrates, the vantage point is integral to the heretical process. Indeed, reception is the slave of perception in that the heuristic and analytical efficacy of the former cannot be measured without full acceptance of the inherent constraints of the latter. In both illustrative examples to be more fully explored in the following two chapters, history exhibits actual events of acute, personal attacks on the members of the religious group in question. Even if the reliability of the historical record is questioned, however, the minimum requirement for an analysis of social heresy is simply the in-group perception of opposition. As Moore states later in his book, ‘[Joseph Smith’s] mission had no chance of going anywhere without opposition, both *real and imagined*’ (emphasis added).<sup>152</sup> Be it rhetorical device propelled by cunning agendas or careless historical scholarship, the absence of significant external forces of heresy does not necessarily preclude the presence of a reception mentality. Although the notion of a religious group possessing such a state of mind is a rather simple one, two elements should be

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<sup>149</sup> R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 31-2.

<sup>150</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 41.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>152</sup> Moore, 34.



highlighted. The first is the social status/social power of the group; the other is the confusion surrounding the event of reception.

### *Power & Status*

When discussing the reception of heresy, one must give pride of place to the topics of societal marginality and social power. Not only are the two necessarily connected, but the experience of heresy as an opposition against beliefs, social status, and physical wellbeing inevitably underscores the degree to which a group has enjoyed acceptance by its society. Each of the three forms of opposition, likewise, affects status and power in a unique way. For example, doctrinal opposition can only come after the initial expression of beliefs by the opposed group, for there must be something to oppose. Accordingly, the group may experience an increase in the intensity of their social marginality which effectively means an increase in the other two types (societal and physical). In contrast, the amount of power or status accorded a community that has not yet articulated aberrant doctrines and/or has not sought any social acceptance may or may not fluctuate at all. What is most important for the present purposes is that the reception event entails, at the least, society's collective statement on the social status of the opposed group. At times, it is both a statement and a calculated response from society meant to diminish the power and ensure lower status in the future by accusing the nascent movements of subversive practices, an incredibly effective method of marginalisation employed against both the early Christians and the early Mormons.

For those in the in-group, this event is initially perceived as injurious and undesirable, but it is not yet recognised as social heresy. In this moment, the heresy is only (but meaningfully) an original, agonistic experience such as physical persecution or political oppression. This occurs as acute, destabilising heresy within the *Lebenswelten* of the individuals and the collective. In the case of physical heresy, both the immediate victims and those who are more indirectly touched by the incidents may experience almost instantaneous anomie for, as Berger says,

The marginal situation *par excellence*, however, is death. Witnessing the death of others (notably, of course, of significant others) and anticipating his own death, the individual is strongly propelled to question the *ad hoc* cognitive and normative procedures of his 'normal' life in society.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 32.

Later, Berger says that these same experiences are ‘the most important marginal situations,’ to face death is to face a total disruption in social order.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, it is a challenge to maintain the belief that one’s group is centrally significant in a society which is currently threatening that group’s very existence. This is all the more strongly felt when the group is of a religious nature - in most cases, such a group will hold certain beliefs concerning salvation, transcendence, and the supernatural, and these beliefs and their explanatory power may receive direct impact from the blows of death and persecution. This is not to claim, however, that the reception of heresy is *actually* or *ultimately* detrimental to the cohesion of the group or its soteriological systems. In fact, this study contends otherwise and, hopefully, goes some way toward arguing that these experiences (when ‘recognition’ occurs) result in more complex and adaptable systems of belief. In fact, even simple rituals may alleviate the pain and social disillusionment accompanying the reception of heresy. One example of this is to be found among the various aboriginal peoples of Australia whose intricate death rites serve to ease the evolution, not from a pre-death to a uniquely post-death state but from rupture to normality.<sup>155</sup>

The topic of death, of course, is quite significant for sociologically-informed studies of religion. As Daniel Bell notes, the ‘human predicament’ is characterised by a ‘nagging sense of mortality’.<sup>156</sup> Much like the existential emphasis of Berger’s statements above, Bell’s belief is that any attempt to understand human culture will involve addressing the crisis of impending death. Psychologists also seem to concur on this point; human behaviour is often motivated by thoughts on or reactions to, death. As a member of the psychological field, Nathan Adler borrowed from theological language and constructed a definition for what he called ‘the antinomian personality’.<sup>157</sup> ‘Antinomian’ (from *αντι* + *νόμος*, ‘against law’) was first used by Martin Luther to describe various Christian groups of his day who had entirely discarded the Decalogue or any other moral code as a result of their firm (and

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>155</sup> Mol, *Meaning and Place*, 6. ‘It is as though the deceased has left a tear in the social fabric that the rituals then carefully, slowly, yet persistently, mend.’

<sup>156</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Winding Passage: Sociological Essays and Journeys* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 333-36.

<sup>157</sup> Nathan Adler, *The Underground Stream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 59.

extremely literal) understanding of *sola fide*.<sup>158</sup> In this sense, antinomian came to refer to such groups and the general outlook they represented; a theological understanding of grace in which an irreversible type of justification occurs wholly separate from behaviour or adherence to moral law and which results in the belief that sin is impossible. Adler, however, takes the term more literally and appropriates it for his own purposes - he is in good company, of course, as the earlier comments on Durkheim's use of *anomie* and Berger's application of *nomos* show<sup>159</sup> - explaining his use of the expression in his study of various counter-cultural movements of the 1960s:

The personality type which I call 'antinomian' is manifested by one whose frame of reference is threatened or has been disrupted. He suffers from a breakdown in the balance of his control and release mechanisms and from the *permeability of his body boundaries*. (emphasis added)<sup>160</sup>

In Adler's view, those who exhibit the antinomian personality also can be said to express a 'gnostic orientation' in opposition to 'the lawful or legitimate institutions of the particular society' in which they reside.<sup>161</sup> Although the present concern is not with subversive, psychological modes, Adler's understanding of the antinomian personality as 'one whose frame of reference is threatened' and who experiences 'the permeability of his body boundaries' is helpful for underscoring the perceived loss of social power or capital and the disconcerting effects of having confronted death as well as physical, societal, and doctrinal opposition.

Viewed in this negative sense, with heresy presented as the absence or decrease of social influence or power, one can begin to recognise the nature of the reception episode. Again, this event is ultimately undesirable whether or not the group incited or encouraged such distressing opposition. Some groups may come to value the functional potential of the following two episodes in the process and, thus, embrace agonism in their relations with society. For others, the occasion of facing

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<sup>158</sup> Martin Luther, *Against Antinomians*, Luther's Works, vol. 47, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 107-19.

<sup>159</sup> Each of these are essentially equating the Greek term for 'law' with 'order'. Durkheim's 'anomie' is the lack of order, Berger's 'nomos' is a religious ordering of the world and lived experience, and (as will be shown) Adler's 'antinomian' is the psychological personality that shirks or eschews the normative order of society.

<sup>160</sup> Adler, 59.

<sup>161</sup> Adler, Foreword, xix.

death, injury, and marginality is alienating and deleterious precisely because it is novel and collective foresight is absent. Even so, existence on the periphery of society may lead to certain affinities between group members and soteriologies that empower. Davies connects salvation beliefs with an innate human need for empowerment, suggesting that religious adherents will predictably disavow one system of meaning in favour of another if the latter appears ‘more compelling or all-embracing’.<sup>162</sup> A similar assumption is manifested here, and illustrated later, as those religious groups who are opposed by their societies, physically persecuted, and theologically or ideologically challenged are shown to interpret the struggle in terms of a loss of power, order, and stability. Although this initially creates existential angst and confusion, it can often lead to the espousal of deifying soteriologies. Such resolving beliefs, however, cannot occur until after the recognition of heresy. Likewise, recognition may not elevate the agonistic quality of the shared experiences to the level of collective consciousness without said experiences having first confounded the actors.

#### *Dissonance, Equivocation, and Cognition*

Spearheaded by Harvey Whitehouse and research institutes such as the Cognition and Culture Research Unit of Aarhus University, the cognitive science of religion has become one of the predominant approaches to religious studies in the twenty-first century.<sup>163</sup> Taking as its foundational assumption the belief that human cognition not only helps explain specific religious phenomena but actually illuminates the biological propensities for religious belief inherent in human evolution, this relatively recent perspective justifiably directs attention to the role of cognition and mental processing in humanity’s interaction with religion (at both the institutional and individual levels). Well before these types of studies were in vogue, however, psychologist Leon Festinger *et alii* engaged in a groundbreaking field study on the psychological effects of prophetic disconfirmation.<sup>164</sup> In the published summary of

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<sup>162</sup> Davies, *Meaning and Salvation*, 11.

<sup>163</sup> See, Harvey Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2004).

<sup>164</sup> Leon Festinger, et al., *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).

the study, Festinger coined a term which was subsequently incorporated into everyday parlance: 'cognitive dissonance'.<sup>165</sup> By this term, Festinger and his colleagues intended to elucidate the mental unrest exhibited by members of the small apocalyptic group they studied. The party in question, a small collective of like-minded individuals who shared a passion for extraterrestrial topics such as Martians and UFOs and who also centred themselves on the other-worldly 'communications' received by one of their fold, had publicly announced a number of specific prophecies concerning the end of the world and accompanying catastrophic events. Festinger and others managed to infiltrate the group and observe members' reactions when the aforementioned prophecies were disconfirmed.

As a form of cognition, dissonance referred to the adherence to and possession of two or more inconsistent beliefs, opinions, or attitudes. As an example, Festinger mentions a cigarette smoker who believes that smoking is detrimental to physical health.<sup>166</sup> In that case, the smoker actively participates in the very activity he or she believes to be undesirable. In such instances, the individual is forced to reconcile the contradictory information, a process that may be rapid with the dissonance mollified relatively effortlessly or that may cause significant disorientation and psychological grief. Either way, the very nature of cognitive dissonance is an immediate need to regain consonance between existing expectations and present experiences. In his landmark study, Festinger concludes that when the cause of the dissonance is the irrefutable and irreconcilable disconfirmation of a specific religious belief, the affected individual is likely to intensify their proselytising efforts and entrench themselves more firmly in their doctrines.

Although cognitive dissonance was very briefly alluded to in our previous chapter, here the significance of these findings is unmistakeable. *When Prophecy Fails* brought cognition within the scope of religious studies. Accordingly, the publication of these concepts supplemented, from a social-psychological angle, the longstanding assumptions of the sociology of religion by demonstrating the role of individual cognitive activities for the behaviour of a religious group. In particular, the study corroborated the assertion of the sociology of knowledge that the taken-for-granted 'reality' of a group necessarily requires social support and incessant

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 26.

reiteration. Festinger found that the group members who were isolated during the period in which their eschatological prophecy was disconfirmed were not able to maintain belief in the prophecies and veracity of the group's identity.<sup>167</sup> However, for those who had remained together in the same house during and after the hours in which the world was supposed to experience cataclysmic events, faith remained and rationalisations intended to explain the failed prophecy were found to be adequate.

Despite the fact that this result, that faith went unchallenged only for those who had remained in the same house during the failed prophecy, received little attention both in the book and subsequently, it is perhaps the most germane of Festinger's observations for the sociological study of heresy because it suggests a direct interplay between individual cognition and social life, between agonistic experiences (disconfirmed prophecy) and socially-legitimated mechanisms of resolution (postulated reasons for the failure being shared among adherents in the same house). In this way, that which appears to the sociologist to be predictable social patterns is approached here from an alternate vantage and described in terms of the success or failure of attempts to manage dissonance. With that in mind, it is no stretch to imagine 'cognitive dissonance' as closely related to anomie, angst, antinomianism, etc., all ultimately representing the existential crises facing religious believers when forces outside of their control threaten existing meaning systems and demand explanation.

We should note that the relevance of cognitive dissonance to the study of heresy was also recognised by Zito. In the previous chapter, Zito's work on the sociology of heresy was described as an attempt to apply the discursive analysis of Foucault and Derrida to the concept of heresy itself. Under such a light, Zito was said to offer a unique definition of heresy: 'an attack, veiled or quite open, upon an institutionalised way of speaking about the world.' This, he claims, makes heresy directly connected to social deviance. Although the 'institutionalised' element of Zito's definition may yet rely too heavily on traditional understandings wherein a conspicuously 'orthodox' position predominates, his ensuing observations are highly incisive. After noting that, among believers, beliefs are understood as engendering desirable behaviours, Zito associates cognition with heresy:

And yet the true believer finds, in the case of heresy, that the beliefs he has devoutly held may lead to quite other consequences than his faith has led him

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<sup>167</sup> Festinger, et al., 229.

to expect. A heresy accordingly places the true believer in a state of cognitive dissonance, imbalance or incongruity. Heresy plays with the cognitive base upon which beliefs and meanings are erected...<sup>168</sup>

In other words, if beliefs influence actions, one must possess a high level of certainty as to the meanings of the language used to articulate those beliefs in order to avoid confusion when such doctrines appear to stimulate alternative practices. In this sense, Zito's discursive view of heresy is one in which those same words are taken to have unorthodox meanings, leading to the potential institutional sanctioning of unorthodox behaviours.

The cognitive dissonance described by Zito, then, is essentially the result of equivocation; the same terms are used but with different meanings, an occurrence that quite naturally causes confusion for the longstanding members of the group. If one expands Zito's basic model to include not only literal linguistic perplexity but also the cognitive dissonance consequent upon societal and physical opposition, the phenomenon of reception comes into focus. The religious group is ostracised, persecuted, refuted vigorously in the public square, attacked in printed diatribes (a particularly vicious approach used against Mormons), and generally rejected; this loss of influence and power, doctrinal contention, and victimisation causes disquiet and puzzlement. The adherents face formidable challenge but do not yet recognise it as such, for the cognitive dissonance between their nascent but burgeoning religious identity and the overt denunciation from society operates subconsciously. Much like Festinger's subjects, the individual and the collective are perceptibly upset by the forced realisation of the disconfirmation (or perhaps, rejection) of their identities, a specific concern that receives notable emphasis during the resolution of heresy.

To emphasise the pre-conscious character of this event is to relate it directly to Bourdieu's *doxa* and Arnal's delineation between heresy and heterodoxy, both explained in the preceding chapter. When heresy occurs, the tacitly taken-for-granted *doxa* is exposed. That exposure of what had previously been unnecessary to articulate causes the consternation that we have described in this section. Just as the secret mantras assigned to individuals in the Transcendental Meditation movement of the 1960s and 1970s in America were believed to lose their sacred power if disclosed,<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Zito, 128.

<sup>169</sup> Mol, *Meaning and Place*, 49.

so the sacred significance of religious identity is threatened when in the presence of the alarming potency of heresy. Yet, as Berger says, 'The power of religion depends...upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of men as they stand before death...'<sup>170</sup> Accordingly, the heretical process is not encapsulated by the deconstructing and externally-sourced event of reception but proceeds into the collective awareness of the group as they recognise the threat and begin to adaptively act to resolve the disruption.

## Recognition

Festinger's hypothesis concerning the disconfirmation of religious prophecies included the idea that adherents would respond to failed predictions by actually increasing their proselytising efforts, exposing themselves to public scrutiny for the sake of reaching potential converts, a hypothesis which was supported by the group's behaviour after their primary, eschatological prophecy never came to fruition. The once-secretive group suddenly became proactive in contacting journalists and releasing confidential audio recordings.<sup>171</sup> In this way, cognitive dissonance was met with urgency and fervour; it seemed that their angst, instead of being addressed directly, was ameliorated by being channelled into further activity.

This passion and ardour is important for our analysis of the heretical process because the reception of opposition positions the religious group in a state of waning social status. The experience of agonism does not necessarily equal conscious awareness of impending peril, but it does force an encounter with the inescapability of mortality. To apply phenomenological terms, then, the *Lebenswelt* of the adherents is breached. Separated from their 'reality', staring at the *doxa* eviscerated from the axioms of existence, the religious members enter into a state similar to ritual liminality.<sup>172</sup> Just as anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner understood the liminal stage of religious rituals to include a sort of productive limbo,

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<sup>170</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 60.

<sup>171</sup> Festinger, et al., 209-15.

<sup>172</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, 2010), 11, 21. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), 48, 94-130. Van Gennep first presented a case for a threefold model of rites in which the individual or group passes through stages of separation, transition, and incorporation (preliminal, liminal, and postliminal). Turner developed these ideas more fully, dedicating an entire chapter to the subject. For both, the three stages are idealised forms of the ritual process; often they overlap or appear disproportionately.



a *tabula rasa*, so the recognition of heresy involves the conscious awareness of one's predicament and the first notion that resolution is not only needed but is possible.<sup>173</sup>

If, as it is for Berger, ritual is understood to be the preservation of sacred experiences for those who were not present for the events, and such a notion is combined with Turner's belief that rituals are not epiphenomena but are agents of social change,<sup>174</sup> then it is appropriate to view the three events of the heretical process and the three stages of the ritual process as *eiusdem generis*. Recognition is the transition between the opposition-induced bifurcation (between in/out group, acceptance/rejection, power/subjection) of reception and the integrative goal of resolution.

In other words, we can view the social process initiated by heresy as both the transcendence of the life-world re-enacted and preserved through ritual and the actual medium of social change itself. The heretical process is repeated incessantly, its episodes overlapping and interacting; *ipso facto*, it resembles the ritual process adumbrated by anthropologists such as Van Gennep and Turner - specifically, the recognition of heresy is notably similar to the liminality that characterises the brief transition from the social stripping of identity involved in the early stages of ritual and the reconstitution which follows. With regards to the reconstitution of a new identity after the liminal stage, we should note that anthropologist Maurice Bloch developed Turner's ideas further by emphasising the psychological/existential change that takes place in the individual through the ritual. In insisting that the identity change goes deeper than a mere transformation of social status, Bloch's thoughts anticipate our own interpretation of the senses of purpose and individual progress central to early Christian and early Mormon notions of deification.<sup>175</sup>

However, for now we remain fixed on ritual liminality, a transitional stage illustrated by Van Gennep's example from the Basoko people of the Congo. He noted that when twins are born to members of this group, the children are confined to their

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<sup>173</sup> Van Gennep, 114-15. Van Gennep describes the manner by which rules and laws are held in abeyance for the 'novitiates', not having yet received their new identity these individuals are seen as somehow removed from the governing parameters of the community. Turner, 95, 96. Turner says that 'neophytes' in the liminal stage are 'neither here nor there'; they are 'betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law...'

<sup>174</sup> Bobby C. Alexander, 'Correcting Misinterpretations of Turner's Theory: An African-American Pentecostal Illustration,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30.1 (1991): 27-8.

<sup>175</sup> Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.

home until they are six years old. This 'transitional period' fills the symbolic and temporal gap between the rituals of birth and the rituals of acceptance into the community.<sup>176</sup> It must be noted that this transformation, marked also by painted posts outside the parents' house, ensured corporate ratification of the twins' identity both as new members and as aberrations; before the twins and their parents could fully assume their new social roles, this intermediate stage was needed to bring the group into a state of uniformity and consensus.

In much the same fashion, recognition creates homogeneity within the group as all come to share an epistemic sentence of their plight which, unavoidably, dissolves social distinctions and begins to enable solidarity centred on the potential for a new, more resilient identity. Thus, as we might infer from Arnal's discussion of the unveiling of *doxa* or Zito's mention of cognitive dissonance, with awareness comes a 'rallying cry' to defend the threatened identity or hastily construct a new one. Whether choosing the one path or the other, the opposed party will almost certainly demonstrate great zeal in their principal response, the animosity directed toward the afflicted party finding quick and corresponding acrimony, an inevitably emotional counterbalance the genesis of which is the (now shared) awareness of the group's poor social standing.

### *Hostility to Heresy*

In 1798, thirty years before the publication of the Book of Mormon and the official founding of the Mormon movement, Charles Backus addressed a church in Leicester, Massachusetts. In the homily, Backus held forth on the history of opposition to Christianity. With pith and precision, he informed his audience,

It must be allowed, that, when the public mind has long run in one track, it admits of the overthrow of any thing [sic], held in high repute, with great reluctance. There are strong prejudices to encounter, in such instances, where any thing [sic] is known to be endangered that goes under the name of religion; nor can it be expected that such attachments will be broken without violent struggles.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Van Gennep, 47.

<sup>177</sup> Charles Backus, *The Principle Causes of the Opposition to Christianity Considered: a sermon, delivered at the ordination of the Rev. Zephaniah Swift Moore, to the pastoral care of the Congregational Church in Leicester, Massachusetts, January 10, 1798* (Worcester: 1798), 7.

These violent struggles are an indispensable component of the recognition event. The consciousness of the group's predicament leads to vehemence as their collective identity is threatened. Mol's observation on the barriers humans erect around their identities comes to the fore in this portion of the heretical process. Identity is holy, although correspondingly frail. Inasmuch as one accepts Mol's claim that religion is that which sacralises identity, Backus' statement should come as no surprise. Anything overtly connected to religion will be defended with violence as the group members mobilise not in protection of doctrine but in defence of stability. Psychologist Erik Erikson observed a similar phenomenon among children who guarded their identity 'with the astonishing strength encountered in animals who are suddenly forced to defend their lives.'<sup>178</sup> In religious communities, this behaviour may be justified through an appeal to the group's belief in absolute truth, rationalising the aggression by interpreting the challenge to identity as a challenge against natural order or law.

This misguided reasoning was noted by Simmel at the beginning of the twentieth century: 'This truth [that religion is the purest form of group unity] is demonstrated by the energy with which every heresy...is combated.'<sup>179</sup> Opposition is not only (when it is at all) a challenge against dogma but is the imposition or presentation of instability into the sacred space harboured by emotional commitment. Again, Hume's thoughts prove insightful and unexpectedly complementary, for in his explication of the relative demerits of monotheism, he says that such a theological paradigm naturally demands a 'unity of faith' and, consequently, leads to competing sects, the stage then being set for conflict:

For as each sect is positive that its own faith and worship are entirely acceptable to the deity, and as no one can conceive, that the same being should be pleased with different and opposite rites and principles; the several sects fall naturally into animosity, and mutually discharge on each other that sacred zeal and rancor, the most furious and implacable of all human passions.<sup>180</sup>

Later in his essay, he anticipates Festinger in showing that the 'devotion and spiritual faith' of religious individuals 'rise with their fears'.<sup>181</sup> Thus, if we can take Hume as

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<sup>178</sup> Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton Press, 1963), 240.

<sup>179</sup> Simmel, 115.

<sup>180</sup> Hume, 161.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

something of an informative antecedent to later social-scientific findings, it seems that the attending emotions involved in the recognition of heresy are not limited to violence and unrestrained aggression but to a broad and ubiquitous passion and volatility, perhaps even a fragile vulnerability as the heresy effectively spotlights the weaknesses of the existing meaning system. Incapable of denying the opposition any longer, the collective responds reflexively.

Zito addresses this directly by equating the ‘heretical’ aspect of a statement with ‘its ability to produce in the faithful a cry of outraged hostility’.<sup>182</sup> According to Zito, the impassioned reaction is how one knows for certain that heresy has occurred, how one *recognises* heresy. However, we must note that the reflexive and typically hostile response is not only an indicator of heresy but is specifically a sign of conscious awareness among the members. Much like the emotional and physiological ‘fight or flight’ phenomenon in which the human sympathetic nervous system is activated,<sup>183</sup> identifying the threat of heresy causes a heightening of collective emotions, a sort of social adrenaline surge. This recognition, however, entails both potentially harmful effects of unchecked animosity as well as potentially beneficial influences on the commitment levels and solidarity of the religion and its constituents. It is with this in mind that Givens argues that heretics present a unique threat to ‘spiritual solidarity’ which, in turn, ‘reflects a...need to exaggerate disparity so that boundaries can be imposed and enforced.’ This amounts to what he calls ‘a tolerable distance’.<sup>184</sup>

This incontrovertible delineation between the in-group and the out-group, engendered by the recognition of heresy, is absolutely integral to comprehending the variety of responses observable in the historical record. Although some new religious movements receive the opposition, their inability to recognise it or to allow that identification to establish a ‘tolerable distance’ precludes the degree of adaptability

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<sup>182</sup> Zito, 126.

<sup>183</sup> This was first noted by physiologist Walter B. Cannon in *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear, and Rage* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1915).

<sup>184</sup> Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*, 76. It is noteworthy that Givens offers an entire chapter (‘This Great Modern Abomination’) on the difficulty of defining heresy in relation to Mormon history. Influenced by Walter Bauer as well as a number of sociologists, Givens expresses his position thus: ‘In reality, orthodoxy comes into being only after there are choices to be made, with competing, and mutually exclusive, options (77).’ As is apparent, this is not altogether different from the position espoused in the present work.

attainable in the resolution episode. In addition, the ‘distance’ is more an embrace or appropriation of the marginalisation received than it is a volitional construction of new parameters. This is the reason behind Givens’ diction; the pre-existent ‘disparity’ is ‘exaggerated’. When a religious community fails to put the heresy to work for their own benefit, they may also fail to incorporate it into their belief system. As long as those within the community share an interpretation of the agonistic experiences, however, the constructive outcomes will emerge with resolution as their goal.

### *So Many Wolves, So Few Sheep*

To borrow another quote from Givens, ‘To speak in these terms [of heresy serving to fabricate distinction and reinforce boundaries] is to recognise the constructed, artificial, and highly malleable nature of categories like heresy and orthodoxy.’<sup>185</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, a significant degree of relativity and subjectivity is indeed inherent in the process of identifying heretics and their heresies. Predictably, then, this relativity surfaces during the social process of heresy; after all, to recognise is to categorise - when reception is not accompanied by recognition, heresy defies description. Perhaps a number of examples will benefit us here before we direct our attention to the resolution event of the heretical process.

In 1949, the *Boston Globe* reported on the recent events attached to Boston College, a Catholic institution of higher education. In the preceding months, an independent Catholic organisation, the St. Benedict Centre, had become increasingly hostile toward Boston College for what the former saw as the instruction of heresy. The vitriol of the St. Benedict Centre and its members was easily seen in the use of the term heresy for the teachings of their opponents.<sup>186</sup> Initially, members of the St. Benedict Centre described ‘Protestantism’ as both ‘the greatest enemy of the Catholic Church today’ and ‘heresy’;<sup>187</sup> however, Boston College came to be seen as an enemy

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 76, 184. In his notes, Givens compares the term ‘heresy’ to the term ‘cult’, commenting on the popular function of each as a means of establishing ‘the transgressive status of a group’. This is closely related to our understanding of heresy as that which opposes the in-group.

<sup>186</sup> Thomas O’Dea, ‘Catholic Sectarianism: A Sociological Analysis of the So-Called Boston Heresy Case,’ *Review of Religious Research* 3.2 (1961): 59-60.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 56. O’Dea references the St. Benedict Centre’s publication, *From the Housetops*: ‘If we are to preserve our faith today we must know our enemies. The greatest enemy of the Catholic Church today is not Communism, as many suppose. It is heresy – Protestantism.’

for supposedly associating with Protestants and the secular world and, thus, implicitly undermining the superiority of the Papacy. In this way, the defenders of Catholicism transformed themselves into dissenters from Catholicism as their actions led to formal rejection from church authorities. Later, we will explore the significance of this sort of devastating rigidity among religious groups in addition to looking at dissension as a form of heresy faced by early Mormons, but our concern here is the observation that those judging Boston College to be teaching ‘heresy’ would eventually receive the same descriptor by the Archbishop of Boston as they were cut off from the Catholic Church.

It is noteworthy, however, that the early history of Mormonism is ripe with similar demonstrations of the importance of perspective in identifying the heretical. In 1831, the Cambellite periodical, *The Evangelist*, printed an article by Josiah Jones entitled, ‘History of the Mormonites’. In this brief essay, Jones recounts the events whereby a number of Cambellites followed Sidney Rigdon out of their circle and into the Mormon Church as the result of Mormon missionary efforts. The editor of the paper, Walter Scott, penned an addendum which followed Jones’ contribution. In a distressed tone, Scott describes the Mormons as ‘impostors’ (twice) and ‘a vile sect’. His opinion of Rigdon is quite unfavourable as well: ‘Rigdon, like a true wolf in sheep’s clothing...surrendered himself and flock to these impostors.’<sup>188</sup>

It seems that the recording of Matthew 7:15,<sup>189</sup> provided every generation since with a convenient idiom with which they could achieve the rhetorically desirable: the simultaneous condemnation of opponents and regulation of adherents through fear and the suppression of choice. The ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’ is ubiquitous in the Christian-based cultures of the West, and the application of such an expression parallels the phenomenon mentioned previously wherein heretical teachings are eventually traced back to an external source which is often believed to be Satan or some other evil force.<sup>190</sup> The early Mormons, it would appear, borrowed

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<sup>188</sup> Josiah Jones, ‘History of the Mormonites,’ *The Evangelist* 9 (1831): 136.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.’

<sup>190</sup> John Taylor et al., *Journal of Discourses*, volume 24 (London: Latter-Day Saint’ Book Depot, 1884), 59. Here, LDS politician and church leader, George Q. Cannon offers a succinct example of this very phenomenon: ‘You will find that the opponents of truth, or, to speak more plainly, ...the followers of Satan – you will find that whenever there was persecution upon the earth, they were its authors.’

this language of Matthew's Gospel and exhibited the very phenomenon about which we speak. Just two years after the publication of the article mentioned above, and just prior to the ransacking of its printing house by an anti-Mormon mob, *The Evening and the Morning Star* (an LDS publication) printed, 'Beware of False Prophets'.<sup>191</sup> In this brief article, William W. Phelps reminded his fellow Latter-day Saints of the various Biblical passages that portend the infiltration of Christian ranks by 'false prophets', endeavouring to ruin ecclesial unity by pilfering the credulous and unwitting.<sup>192</sup> In the space of 2300 words, Phelps wrote the words 'false prophets' fourteen times and included them within the larger phrase 'beware of false prophets' nine times. The general sentiment is best expressed by Phelps himself:

...Amid all the confusion, and trouble now existing, in consequence of so many different denominations, all declaring they are right, and that they take their doctrines from the holy scriptures, we feel it a duty that we owe to God and to all that seek the riches of eternity, to say as Jesus said: Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing.<sup>193</sup>

This sort of demonization of one's opponents, or one's competition on the religious scene, is precisely the reason for our understanding of heresy as opposition. The agonism may originate from within or without, from an oppressed substratum or from a powerful majority, all that matters for the social aspect of religious opposition is that it occurs, is recognised, and is (to some extent) resolved. In Phelps' article, our true concern is with his passing utterance of an obligation to warn those *that seek the riches of eternity*. These weighty words echo his opening sentence in which he divulges the motivation behind his composition of the essay: a desire to 'caution' those earthly 'inhabitants...[who] wish to enter in at the door and be saved'. This emphasis on salvation and eternity is often the core of the resolution event in which religious groups come to incorporate or, by some other means, cope with the heresy they have experienced. Those involved in Boston's St. Benedict Centre as well as the early Mormons and their opponents all framed religious conflict with soteriology. As the present study progresses from recognition to resolution, our focus mimics that shift in sophistication also undertaken by opposed groups as they turn from reflexive

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<sup>191</sup> William W. Phelps, 'Beware of False Prophets,' *The Evening and the Morning Star* 2.14 (1833): 105.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. In addition to the verse from Matthew 7, Phelps refers to 2 Timothy 3:1-5 and Ephesians 4:4-5.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

attitudes toward heresy to the more differentiated, integrating systems meant to achieve some degree of adaptability in the face of challenge.

Turner's anthropological studies revealed a 'social tendency *either* to make what falls outside the norm a matter of concern for the widest recognised group *or* to destroy the exceptional phenomenon' (original emphasis). He compared the latter option to a boy who upon seeing a Giraffe for the first time simply says 'I don't believe it'.<sup>194</sup> The recognition and resolution of heresy may overlap considerably (remember that they are not conceived of as entirely distinct, consecutive stages or phases); however, when a religious community or adherent initiates measures to render heresy innocuous, the scholar of religion witnesses something akin to the ousting of Turner's latter option in favour of his former; unrestrained vehemence and cognitive opacity give way to a concern for both the present and the future wellbeing of the group.

## **Resolution**

In some ways, we see the theories of both Mol and Berger subsumed under the category of resolution. Here, groups establish and emphasise belief systems based on the externalisation of their experiences. These beliefs then act back upon the collective and its members, reinforcing religious identity in the face of heretical agonism. As a result, the social position of the religious group becomes, or engenders, the theological confession of that community. Perhaps this process of heresy resolution can, to some degree, help elucidate the externalisation elements of Berger's theory. Arguably the weakest component of his thinking, externalisation is supposed to be the occurrence whereby humans produce society. In this study, one of admittedly narrower scope, externalisation is at least paralleled by the event of resolution. The cognitive awareness of recognition naturally leads to a corporate desire or impulse for integration/adaptation, producing a belief and/or value system that originated within the collective consciousness but that also often becomes an objectified soteriological schema.

This process also reiterates our preference for Mol's theory over Berger's as the objectification of the theological beliefs seems to be nearly impossible to distinguish from their emphasis, creation, inheritance, internalisation, sacralisation,

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<sup>194</sup> Turner, 49.



etc. Again, Mol highlighted the sacralisation process in which identity is anchored or stabilised by objectification, commitment, ritual, and myth. The stability, however, was his primary concern, and it is no different for us. In resolving heresy, a group and its members consolidate their remaining social capital and steady their capricious existence by embracing a new, more flexible, theology. The significance of the amended or imaginative new belief system is not that it is somehow considered absolute or immutable but that it offers explanatory power for past, present, and future, a key feature of the soteriological schemas that we investigate in Chapter Four. Having arisen from the ashes left by persecution, for example, these new systems possess potential that would have been impossible previously. As the next two chapters will show, at least in our two historical cases, this potential was realised and the opposition experienced by the collective gave rise to a soteriology capable of reinforcing identity and explaining negative experiences.

In his recent book on the physical boundaries of nineteenth century Mormons and Shakers, for example, Taysom mentions that the death of Joseph Smith left the Latter-day Saints in a state of liminality. He notes, however, that Brigham Young and others actually record an increased sense of unity and serenity among the Saints in the aftermath of Smith's death, the liminal stage creating solidarity and peace.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, it has already been shown that liminality as both Van Gennep and Turner imagine it can result in heightened solidarity as social distinctions are lost and the collective is mobilised. Certainly, one should acknowledge such potential during the recognition of heresy, for the principal difference between recognition and resolution is that the latter seeks to ensure longevity, future viability through adaptability.

In 1842, the *New York Herald* printed insightful (and relevant to our discussion) words directed at Joseph Smith who had recently been accused of conspiring to murder the ex-Governor of Missouri:

We advise Joe Smith to be quiet – his enemies and slanderers will make him a better prophet than he could hope to be made by any other process. Opposition was the making of Moses – of Mahomet – of Napoleon - of every great master spirit that has appeared in this dirty world below.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Taysom, *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds*, 79.

<sup>196</sup> *New York Herald*, 14 June 1842, quoted in *The Viper on the Hearth*, by Terryl Givens, 60-1.

Similarly, by 1882, George Q. Cannon could say of the opposition presented by the US government against the Mormon practice of polygamy, 'Let persecution come if it will have a good effect.'<sup>197</sup> Of course, this view, that opposition can strengthen unity and bolster one's social position, has been noted by sociologists and historians for many years.<sup>198</sup> Simmel, for instance, claimed that persecuted groups needed the agonism, victory over those forces would mean dissolution of the community.<sup>199</sup> Likewise, Kai Erikson noted that the Quakers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony lost their passion as soon as England stepped in to cease their persecution at the hands of the local Puritans. Subsequently, the Quaker movement in the region struggled to survive.<sup>200</sup> The tension for each of these examples was not only beneficial for solidarity and identity, it was integral. However, though the resolution of heresy certainly involves the incorporation of conflict into structures of religious belief, conflict is not always the primary scaffolding of that edifice, and we should carefully consider Bruce's proviso: '...Far from being initially desired for its group-reinforcing functions, separation from the wider society was often reluctantly adopted by the sect only after it had failed to persuade the rest of the world to accept its standards.'<sup>201</sup> In many cases, however, religious parties successfully absorb heretical experiences in the process of resolution, benefitting from the opportunity to anchor their identities in a resultant fortitude.

### *Integrating Heresy*

Discussing his findings with regards to 'antinomian' religious groups, Adler notes that all share 'identical modes of adaptation as a response to similar kinds of

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<sup>197</sup> John Taylor et al., *Journal of Discourses*, volume 24, 107. This is not unlike Tertullian's statement from the early third century: '*Crudelitas uestra gloria est nostra.*' Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, Library of Latin Texts – Series A (Turnhout, 2010), 5.

<sup>198</sup> Moore, 35; Eduard Iricinschi and Holger Zellentin, eds., *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, 13. In his discussion of the nascent Mormon Church, Moore says, 'Persecution arguably was the only possible force that would have allowed the infant church to prosper.' Based on their studies of early Christianity, historians Iricinschi and Zellentin claim that 'normative self-definition operates through separation, exclusion, and a heightened sense of religious identity, and regarding religious *conflict* and polemical attitudes as conducive to religious self-definition (emphasis added).'

<sup>199</sup> Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations*, 97-8.

<sup>200</sup> Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, 124-25.

<sup>201</sup> Bruce, 143.

social stress.’<sup>202</sup> This adaptive response most often takes the form of an ‘apocalyptic drama’ as groups posit new, millenarian, chiliastic myths that function to make sense of the stress occurring in their society. In many cases, the myth is received with fervour; speaking in tongues and charismatic leaders both accompanying the newfound zeal and identity.<sup>203</sup> Adler supports his argument with examples taken from disparate times and locations in history: Jews, early Christians, Anabaptists, cargo cults, ‘Gnosticism’, and even the Hippie culture of the 1960s and 70s. Due to the complexity of variables involved in the common espousal of any one religious narrative by a collective, we ultimately reject Adler’s assertion that these theological/philosophical responses are ‘sentimental improvisations’. However, his observations are still instructive in that he explicates the core of the resolution event – namely, the formulation/illumination of a religious myth or narrative that serves to ‘reach for a new man and the redemption of time’.<sup>204</sup>

The Spanish Biblical Scholar and Theologian, Agustín Del Agua believes that the Christian message is one inherently inclined toward narrative formulations. For him, Christian faith is the telling of an event, the ‘interventions of God in [individuals’] own lives that allow believers to narrate themselves in the key of salvation.’<sup>205</sup> For Del Agua, it is the ‘process of faith tied to history’ which is at work among the Israelites, seeing themselves as God’s chosen people more and more as they understood their own shared experiences as a ‘whole history from beginning to end in a unity of meaning’.<sup>206</sup> Del Agua also sees the same occurring with early Christians because, as he astutely notes, ‘It is natural for religious identity to be expressed in narrative form.’<sup>207</sup> Whilst we certainly agree with Del Agua’s observation of Christianity and Judaism, he does not seem to recognise just how ‘natural’ and prevalent this phenomenon is. In an ostensibly inadvertent manner, he

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<sup>202</sup> Adler, 22.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 23, 25-6.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>205</sup> Agustín Del Agua, ‘The Narrative Identity of Christians according to the New Testament,’ *Creating Identity*, eds. Hermann Häring, Maureen Junker-Kenny, and Dietmar Mieth (London: SCM Press, 2000), 91.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 98.

corroborates the sociological views described earlier which would reinterpret his ‘interventions of God’ as ‘penetrations of paramount reality’. These destabilising experiences, supernatural or not, are often preserved through ritual and myth precisely so that members might ‘narrate themselves’ and achieve existential harmony. In this same way, the resolution of opposition entails a narration of group life, a temporal and sequential rooting of the collective consciousness.

In asserting that the resolution of heresy involves anchoring believers in a history, we not only echo Berger’s understanding of the function of ritual but Adler’s statement that historical events do not ‘exist’ but are ‘construed’.<sup>208</sup> Similarly, Castelli’s study of *Martyrdom and Memory* led her to affirm that early Christian historians did not simply preserve the story of persecution, they ‘created’ it.<sup>209</sup> This assertion may become unconvincing if taken too literally, but Castelli’s argument has much in common with Adler’s and should be duly noted. The expressive actions of religious groups with regards to their origins, traditions, pasts, and beliefs has less to do with contrived and erroneous histories and more to do with the narration of meaning necessitated by the incessant, dialectical processes of heresy resolution and identity reconstitution. In the following chapters, then, it will be shown that both the early Christians and the early Mormons were embroiled in these activities and that their experiences of religious conflict ultimately, and directly, affected the theologies they promulgated.<sup>210</sup> More specifically, these myths emerged from the turmoil as complex soteriologies, the individual and the collective both finding crucial roles in the schema.

### *Articulating Salvation*

It may be important to reiterate, here, that, in their efforts to resolve conflict, religious groups come to avow certain soteriologies, complex schemas that are the product of the interminable negotiations between identity and agonism. As the primary conceptual and pragmatic response to heresy, soteriology should be seen as

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<sup>208</sup> Adler, 23.

<sup>209</sup> Castelli, 25.

<sup>210</sup> Taysom, *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds*, 200. We agree with Taysom who says that Mormons ‘encoded’ the negative responses of outsiders ‘into a narrative of persecution that reinforced their self-understanding as the chosen people of God.’

the nexus of religious conviction. Such beliefs are not necessarily the outcome of experiencing heresy *tout court*; the resources used in constructing the system are typically available beforehand. In fact, whereas the beliefs of one group may be entirely syncretistic, another may achieve resolution by stressing advantageous portions of a single tradition they have adopted or inherited. Accordingly, the process can also entail some combination of these alternatives. Here we simply want to stress that, whatever the case may be, the soteriology of the opposed community is likely to include a developed anthropological component so that it simultaneously offers eschatological hope as well as saving imperatives in the here and now.

Much could be (and has been, elsewhere) said concerning the development, role, and variations of religions and their soteriologies. For the sake of brevity and argument, however, our focus is limited to the complex structures engendered by the encounter with heresy. Soteriological schemas, as they are to be labelled throughout the remainder of the study, reveal a predominant and intense focus on purpose. This claim is clearly undergirded by the general axioms of social science, such as the assumption that human experience is itself propelled by a drive for meaning, but speaking in terms of ‘purpose’ rather than ‘meaning’, as we often do in our fourth chapter, is intentional for the narrower discussion of soteriology as an interpretive schema capable of conferring stable identity on both the group and its members. In Bull’s article listed in the preceding chapter, he defines ‘civil religion’ as ‘the religious symbol system which relates the citizen’s role and American society’s place in space, time, and history to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning.’<sup>211</sup> Were one to substitute ‘citizen’ with ‘adherent’ and ‘American society’ with ‘religious community’, the resulting statement would succinctly, effectively express what we mean by soteriological schema. Note that the definition relates the more restricted variables of ‘role’ and ‘place’ to the broader frame of ‘meaning’.

We should note, then, that soteriological schemas can be relatively complex as they attempt to explain existence in terms of individual and group purposes. This relates to Berger’s finding that legitimations become quite intricate when plausibility structures have repeatedly broken down.<sup>212</sup> As a means of resolution, these systems are necessarily involved in the counterintuitive activity of dissolving distinction

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<sup>211</sup> Bull, 179.

<sup>212</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, 56.

between the sacred and the profane. This is not to say that such schemas dissolve religious boundary markers; indeed, they tend to provide such markers, but they perhaps more importantly provide an in-group framework for comprehending God, divine intervention in the world, the role of individual adherents, the immediate environment, the need for salvation, the process of salvation, group history, etc. They are constructions that function by imposing welcomed parameters around sacred thoughts. Sacred and profane lose some of their distinction because the soteriology, after integrating opposition, is capable of interpreting nearly everything as an element of a networked purpose and, *a fortiori*, binary opposites are nullified. In some sense, the same goes for Mol's adaptability/stability dialectic, as we will see in our exploration of early Mormon dissenters; soteriological schemas incorporate the constancy and differentiation of the religious group into a unified identity. Indeed, this is at least implicit in Mol's argument and is undoubtedly the reason for his choice of a dialectical (as opposed to dualistic) model.

From the broadest level of purpose, soteriological schemas can be further deconstructed into group and self narratives. As mentioned above, the integration of heresy results in resolution through narration. At the group level, this narrative history (or narrative theology) includes cosmology and the preservation of supernatural interventions throughout time, the collective receives purpose and mission. Although reality is often much less tidy than the ideal types we are explicating, it is beneficial to conceptualise the group-level narratives as the resolution of both the societal and doctrinal heresies. At the individual, or self, level, however, the narrative infuses the believer with identity and a pragmatic course of action, often manifested as moral prerogative in relation to ultimate potential. The direct, physical attacks encountered during persecutions are rectified in the personal (even, somatic) redemption offered by the salvation scheme. As the opposed believers seek the *certitudo salutis*, one witnesses Weber's elective affinities at play. Looking for purpose amidst heretical events and the embitterment that ensues, group members connect with soteriologies capable of situating the agonism within a theological/anthropological system of meaning; thus discovering a balanced identity.

This notion is implicitly attested by Davies when he discusses the early Christian impartation of Jesus with Messianic sentiments. As being Christian came more and more to mean something separate from being Jewish, that which distinguished the two parties (a veneration of Jesus as Christ) also came to be

increasingly venerated. For Davies, this might explain the transformation from viewing Jesus as Jewish prophet to Jesus as ‘Gentile God’.<sup>213</sup> More importantly, it points to the proposition that certain groups, through a multifarious network of experiences and contexts, may come to have an affinity with specific theologies. The idea is more fully developed by New Testament scholar Stephen Patterson as he, like Davies, suggests that Jesus was accorded a high degree of significance as Jews and then Christians came to find identity in what the Christ-figure could potentially represent. Referencing passages from Isaiah, Daniel, 1 Corinthians, and many Second-Temple Jewish texts; Patterson contends that Jewish identity had come to be grounded in martyrdom, and Jesus’ life was interpreted as that of a resurrected martyr by Paul and others who had an affinity with the sense of purpose that such a belief could provide.<sup>214</sup> It would be impossible to irrefutably prove that this process took place in this way, but Patterson and Davies both indicate that underprivileged religious groups may, by virtue of being so, possess an affinity for certain soteriological beliefs. These beliefs, in turn, entail an explicit focus on the individual believer and his or her physical life.<sup>215</sup> Similarly, as we will see in the remainder of our study, those groups who attempt to resolve heresy often accept a soteriology entailing deification or some other comprehensible route guiding the behaviour of the individual and ameliorating the fragility of his or her identity.

### **From Opposition to Salvation**

Mol once remarked, ‘The relevance of a moral system lies in its capacity to be concrete rather than eternal. The relevance of a meaning system lies in its capacity to be eternal rather than concrete.’<sup>216</sup> For those religious groups who encounter and recognise the potentially harmful effects of heresy, their ability to achieve resolution is indivisible from their aptitude at confessing a soteriological schema constituted by both concreteness and an eternal focus, moral pragmatism and transcendence. In Berger’s terms, the heresy must be incorporated into the process of cosmisation, the

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<sup>213</sup> Davies, *Anthropology & Theology*, 151.

<sup>214</sup> Stephen J. Patterson, *Beyond the Passion: Rethinking the Death and Life of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 109-11.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. ‘For the martyr, release from the vulnerable, physical body and the restoration of that body, but now in an invulnerable, imperishable form, would be the very definition of salvation.’

<sup>216</sup> Mol, *Meaning and Place*, 82.

social experiences must be objectivated into a comprehensive nomos. In the light of Mol's theory, it is clear that resolution necessarily accompanies reception and recognition as the religious community naturally strives to maintain a balance between differentiation and identity as the latter is threatened by instability.

We take the sociology of knowledge and the theories of Mol as instructive in our investigation into groups confronted by heresy and the soteriologies they hold to be meaningful. Mol's thoughts are particularly significant as our focus turns toward second-century Christians and early Mormons, two specific historical examples of the heretical process at work. Instead of highlighting the process whereby identity comes to be sacred, however, Part Two emphasises what is taken to be an innate drive for meaning and purpose pursuant upon the strength of balance found in the adaptability/stability dialectic. In terms of the process outlined above, our major interest in the following chapters is the resolution episode. However, in exploring the contexts of second-century Christians and early Mormons in the next chapter, we first identify the heresy (reception/recognition), then, in the final chapter, that opposition is analysed with an eye for how it relates to the forms of deification found in the soteriological schemas of the two parties (resolution).

Although it was hardly a central focus for Mol, his dialectical model offers valuable insight into the future viability of religious groups who are able to remain adaptable whilst maintaining resolute identities. In the cases of early Christianity and early Mormonism, the lessons learned through opposition proved advantageous not only in articulating adaptable soteriologies but in the future employment of those systems during trying times. We believe that the success of both parties was largely a result of carefully resolving heresy during their nascent stages, an idea we revisit in the concluding chapter. That being said, the following chapters only explore these theories within limited bounds and though two historical instances separated both by time and geography hardly demonstrate a universal pattern, they nevertheless display the social behaviours and processes intimated above. Other groups, of course, have encountered similar heresies and responded differently. Immediately one may think of such movements as the nineteenth-century Shakers or the Hutterites, the latter even moving into an isolated western territory of North America shortly before the Mormons did the same. Not all religious groups will resolve heresy with deifying soteriological schemas. Indeed, not all such collectives will resolve the opposition at all, but all will try.



In fact, this chapter has clearly shown that such an epistemological and existential drive is ubiquitous and permeating. Whether noted by Husserl's phenomenology, Berger's theory of social construction, or Mol's insights into the social struggle to safeguard identity, humanity exhibits a profound eagerness to explain and interpret the world. Thus, in bringing Part One of our study to a close, we are reminded that confounding experiences stimulate humanity's innate drive for meaning, an event manifested in the way religious groups articulate their beliefs in relation to social heresies. By erecting our sociologically-informed theoretical scaffolding first, we can now proceed unhindered with our analysis of these communities and their beliefs, sharing Simmel's awe of the ever-present and cyclical nature of the relevant social processes:

...one must bear in mind that religion, as a spiritual experience, is not a finished product but a vital process that each soul must create for itself, no matter how stable the traditional content may be. It is precisely here that the power and depth of religion are found – namely, in its persistent ability to draw a given item of religious data into the flow of the emotions, whose movements must renew it constantly, like the perpetually changing drops of water that beget the stable image of the rainbow.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Simmel, 119.

## PART TWO

### **SURVIVING AND INTEGRATING HERESY**

*‘Mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution.’<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 224.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### LOCATING HERESY: THE THREEFOLD ATTACK

In our effort to discover the social processes behind the apparent elective affinity between new religious groups facing agonistic forces and the sort of soteriology that incorporates deification and individual development, we have shown that heresy can be understood sociologically, as an ideal type of religious opposition, and that, as such, it involves a process of social reconstitution for the religious group opposed. Weber argued for the analytical utility of ideal types even whilst insisting that the concepts described could not be observed in such an unalloyed form. Ideal types assist in analysing religious phenomena by creating formal constructs in relation to which the actual observable patterns and recorded data may be compared. Section two of our study proceeds with a description of concrete historical examples and with subsequent comments on the socio-heretical processes at play in each of them. The trajectory of this discussion originates in the firm understanding of ideal types as abstract intellectual constructs. With this in mind, an exploration of heresy among the early Christians and the early Mormons can clarify and tighten the loose threads woven in the preceding section.

Both groups were opposed by their respective societies, and each community struggled to resolve the conflict after identifying it as such. As previously suggested, the social nature of both the heresy and its resolution may take other forms than those investigated here. Early Christians and early Mormons are not the only examples of persecuted religious groups available from the historical record, and many of the others (e.g., seventeenth-century Quakers) did not produce complex soteriological schemas involving deification as a means of stabilising the social scaffolding of their community. The age-old fallacy, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, endangers many theoretical studies as scholars attempt to discern patterns in the multiform data of the human experience. Even so, it does appear that a specifically social form of heresy does unveil taken-for-granted *doxa* for the opposed group, and this unsettling experience often calls for existential stabilisation through adaptive belief systems. This claim was theoretically substantiated in the two preceding chapters and is afforded considerable cogency in the pages to follow as two separate, but similar, collectives are probed for the light they shed on the heretical process and its significance for inducing religious adaptability.

The current chapter is, in some ways, an expounding of the reception and recognition events introduced in the previous chapter. Thus, it is entitled, 'Locating Heresy'. More importantly, this chapter describes two historical instances of the heretical process at work. Such an endeavour is pursued whilst embracing John Henderson's critique of modern scholarship as being too quick to suspect opacity when attempting to reconstruct the doctrines of past heretics. Henderson decries such research because of its insistence that orthodox groups only offered skewed and impenetrable interpretations of their 'heretical' opponents:

In doing so, [such researchers] sometimes forget that the obstacles themselves, the heresiographical distortions, reveal significant patterns. In fact, these patterns of the ways by which orthodoxy constructs heresy may be of even broader and greater significance than the actual historical character of the heresies. For they may illustrate universal tendencies or templates in human culture and even psychology for representing a hostile or threatening other...While such a general heresiographical template might be difficult to identify or verify by focusing on one particular heresiographical tradition, such as that of early Christianity, it is more readily discernible in a comparative study that incorporates several such traditions. In this case, Niels Bohr's observation that clarity is achieved through breadth seems to hold true.<sup>1</sup>

In the following pages, the reader is confronted by details of both Christianity during the second century and Mormonism during its first fourteen years. The apparent discrepancies between these two groups, however, dissolve as similar experiences and social processes are described. Appealing to these two illustrative examples is far from arbitrary and is intended to demonstrate the potential universality of both the existential dilemmas of agonistic experiences and the integrative, harmonising potency of soteriological schemas for groups on the receiving end of heresy. The latter concern is the focus of Chapter Four, but before one can assay the adaptability of early Christian and early Mormon soteriologies one must persevere in studying the cases of persecution and marginalisation experienced by both parties.

The first half of the present chapter, then, introduces and adumbrates the social heresy faced by Christians in the second century. This period was crucial for the development of Christian theology in the face of localised persecutions, competing religious ideologies, and overt marginalisation. Though persecution seems to have occurred during the first century of Christianity (e.g. Nero), the heretical process

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<sup>1</sup> Henderson, 119.

appears most clearly during the second. The latter century presents us with an important Christian figure who was witness to persecutions, familiar with the eastern and western reaches of the empire, and exerted great effort in refuting the claims of competing religious communities: Irenaeus. This second-century bishop serves as the window into early Christianity as well as a fitting representative of our aforementioned process whereby opposition interrelates with soteriological beliefs.

Accordingly, the following chapters rely disproportionately on the writings of Irenaeus and other texts associated with him when compared to alternative early Christian writings.<sup>2</sup> Never fully breaking its gaze away from the experiences and responses of this early Christian believer, the study is able to illuminate the manner by which social processes interact with theological articulation. In discussing the pre-Nicene era, painting in broad strokes would necessarily bear little fruit; developing doctrines were not yet expressed *ex cathedra*. As a religious leader, however, Irenaeus directly experienced the three-fold antagonism with which we are now familiar and also developed a complex theological anthropology in which salvation is categorically tied to history and the undulations of every individual's biographical timeline. That being said, the ensuing portrait of early Christian struggles is supplemented by references to various contemporaneous texts penned by other Christians as well as non-Christian Romans. The objective is to present a concise but thorough summary of the heresies faced by Irenaeus and his Christian peers.

This same goal, for Joseph Smith and his Mormon peers, is sought in the subsequent portion of the chapter. Early Mormonism exhibited many of the same responses to many of the same tensions and conflicts as the second-century Christians; persecution was localised and acute, the greater society tended to reject them on political and social grounds, and competition arose between the in-group and various out-groups. Smith and his early followers, although unquestionably

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<sup>2</sup> Alongside *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, we include *Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons* and *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. For discussion of Irenaeus as potential author of the former, see: Pierre Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens des IIe et IIIe siècles* (Paris: Cerf, 1961), 54-61; A. Rousseau, *Irénée de Lyons: Contre les heresies* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 8; M.C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae (Brill, 2008), 10 n.24; Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 118-19; Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), 104-05. The earliest attestation to Irenaeus authorship, of course, comes from the *Commentary on I Peter* by Oecumenius. It has also been suggested that Irenaeus was the original eyewitness to Polycarp's martyrdom, this firsthand account was then used for the content of the written text: G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 35.

analogous in many ways, are not intended as a parallel case to that of the early Christians – rather, the early Latter-day Saints and their charismatic leader are a separate illustrative example of the complex interplay between heresy and belief. Strict comparison between these two parties is circumscribed both by the method of our investigation as well as the dissimilarity in the historical record available for each. Whilst considerable information is available for the reconstruction of the second century context, the corpus is dwarfed by the robust documentation of Mormon history. This material difference points to another disparity which demands mention, viz. that as a religious product of Graeco-Roman and Palestinian cultures and traditions, nascent Christianity was strikingly distinct from that later product of nineteenth-century America. To contend that experiences, through social processes, come to influence beliefs, one must acknowledge the indispensable centrality of cultural/historical contexts in the evolution of religious groups. The study now turns its attention to those contexts; the worlds in which fledgling religious communities were affronted by agonistic forces.

### **Pagans, Jews, Gnostics, and Rome: The Irenaean Antecedent**

In his recent address at the Patristics conference, *A Celebration of Living Theology: Engaging the Work of Andrew Louth*, Kallistos Ware paraphrased the influential Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky: ‘To follow the Fathers, we must adopt their existential approach...their mind.’<sup>3</sup> The concern, both for Ware and Florovsky, was that the theologies and texts of the early Christians receive appropriate citation and application, never being entirely alienated from the context within which they were produced. If, as Emerson says, ‘Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds’, then it is a worthy endeavour to visit the *Sitz im Leben* of those individuals.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in investigating the writings of Irenaeus it is also beneficial to explore his context, the religious and social milieu of the second century. A definite tension is to be maintained, however, as Irenaeus serves as an historical example of the heretical process and an antecedent to those similar phenomena observed among the early Mormons. He is both the gateway into the Graeco-Roman environment as

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<sup>3</sup> Kallistos Ware, ‘Trends and Tasks in Contemporary Orthodox Theology,’ Presented at *A Celebration of Living Theology: Engaging the Work of Andrew Louth*, 9-12 July, 2012, Durham University.

<sup>4</sup> Emerson, 358.

well as a sort of exemplar, itself a category fruitful in social analysis of a comparative kind.

Social anthropologist Rodney Needham, introducing his book on *Exemplars*, says,

In *Exemplars*, a...contention is that there are further advantages to be had from suspending the traditional concentration on social facts, and from considering instead the examples presented by individuals. However far-separated in time, or contrasted in other respects, they too demonstrate that certain steady constituents of human response can be discerned by the criteria of comparativism, and that this can be done by the study of individual representations as well as by the analysis of social facts. Considered methodologically, the exemplars...furnish a new and distinct validation of the efficacy of comparative analysis.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the utilisation of comparison, often lambasted as a form of scholarly inquiry yet radically important to fields such as social anthropology, finds legitimisation in the study of representatives. Irenaeus steps into view as a fitting exemplar of a certain type of religious identity constructed in the wake of opposition, finding expression alongside its avowal of complex soteriological concepts. Without question, the hallmark of Irenaeus' soteriology is deification. Historian J.A. McGuckin articulates Irenaeus' significance as an early exponent of this particular belief:

Irenaeus was *the* theologian who developed the notion [of deification] imaginatively, and with freshness of insight...Irenaeus sketched out many of the chief lineaments that would comprise the nexus of *theosis* theory: *its dynamic as a soteriological term*, its rootedness in the concept of creation's purposes, *its close relation to the ideas of corruption and immortality*... (emphasis added)<sup>6</sup>

As an exemplar, however, Irenaeus must not only function as the forebear of an idea but as a conceptual/historical compass allowing his own insights and experiences to illumine the path toward broader trends and patterns present in his context and (it is argued) beyond.

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<sup>5</sup> Rodney Needham, *Exemplars* (London: University of California Press, 1985), preface, xii.

<sup>6</sup> J.A. McGuckin, 'The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappadocians,' *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, eds. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 96.

## The Second Century

As a Christian bishop in the second century, Irenaeus represents a crucial period in the history of Christian development. Indeed, the Christians of his day had begun fully to separate themselves from Judaism but had not yet received the acceptance from the empire that they would in the fourth century. Although they were persecuted, the opposition itself was far less generalised and state-sanctioned than it would be at various points in the third century. The persecution experienced in the second century was sporadic and localised, rarely receiving official endorsement from Rome.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the second century preceded any Christian creedal proclamations and witnessed a loose concept of doctrine and authority; the original apostles had died and the new generation of Christians found themselves heirs to a burgeoning movement consisting of local communities separated by considerable distances.

### *Religious Milieu*

More importantly, however, the Christians of this time existed throughout the Graeco-Roman world. Thus, they were influenced by and were an influence on a great diversity of peoples and beliefs. No longer a branch of Judaism, no longer tied to Jerusalem, Christianity was a new religious movement in a large world of deep history and vast traditions. The Roman religious milieu of this century unequivocally fostered supernaturalism in any number of forms. As the Romans conquered new lands, they often absorbed the religious tendencies and perspectives of those they now governed as long as the latter were willing to participate in the civil religion of the empire.<sup>8</sup> At times, this might mean only a brief acceptance whilst Rome determined the worthiness of the newly acquired peoples' religion.<sup>9</sup> In the case of the Jews, the Romans allowed them to maintain their exclusivist practices and doctrines, excusing

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<sup>7</sup> Morwenna Ludlow, *The Early Church* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 65. Wilken astutely notes that Roman religion was 'civil religion'. One's social existence was bound up in religion, and there was no escape. The Christians, however, seemed to be attempting just such an escape.

<sup>9</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 124. Momigliano notes that this occurred with the Druids who were accused of human sacrifice, a practice that was explicitly outlawed by 97 BCE. This is also important for the later discussion of accusations made against the early Christians.



them from fully assimilating to the pluralistic atmosphere of Graeco-Roman culture on the basis that the Jews had a long, powerful history.

That which is most conspicuous concerning the religious environment of the empire is its enthusiasm for the mystical and supernatural amid such pluralistic circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Historian Arnaldo Momigliano, for instance, notes that there was a ubiquitous concern with dreams, demons, miracles, supernatural healing, and divinization of individuals in the Roman Empire.<sup>11</sup> The idea of a mystical ascension to heaven, for instance, was shared by ‘Paul, Jewish rabbis, Gnostics such as the author of the *Gospel of Truth*, and Plotinus.’<sup>12</sup> As an example of belief in supernatural healing, Momigliano points to the notion that Asclepius could heal the sick. This Greek god surged in popularity in the second century and was believed by the Christian apologist Justin to have been the result of demons mimicking the true characteristics of the Christian God in their fabrication of deities.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, Momigliano’s assertion finds ready corroboration in Graham Anderson, the latter believing that the second century exhibits, ‘...a particularly rich haul of dreams and dreamers. We have Aelius Aristides’ self-portrait through his dreams in the later second century; and an almost exactly contemporary view from the perspective of a professional peddler of dream interpretations, Artemidorus of Daldis.’<sup>14</sup> Aelius Aristides, Anderson describes as a ‘tendentious sophist...living in a fantasy world of self-advertisement, in which dream, miracle or theurgy alike explain a very profitable partnership with’ the gods.<sup>15</sup> This ‘partnership’ illustrates the religious dynamism and

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<sup>10</sup> By ‘pluralism’, we mean the diversity and syncretism resulting from Rome’s expansive reach. By the first and second centuries CE, the imperial cult coexisted alongside oriental cults like those of Isis, Mithras, and Sabazios. There were also influences from secret societies, philosophical schools, and traditional religions like the Jews.

<sup>11</sup> Momigliano, 190.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>13</sup> Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, Writings of Saint Justin Martyr, The Fathers of the Church, Volume 6, Translated by Thomas B. Falls (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), 54. This volume also includes *The Second Apology* and *Dialogue with Trypho*; citations of Justin are taken from this reference unless otherwise noted.

<sup>14</sup> Graham Anderson, ‘Greek Religion in the Roman Empire: Diversities, Convergences, Uncertainties,’ *Religious Diversity in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. Dan Cohn-Sherbok and John M. Court (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 151-52.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 155.

fertility of the second century, a period for which dreams and visions denote the diffusion of the supernatural into the immediate realm of experience.

As one might expect, the permeation of many Romans' *Lebenswelten*, exemplified in the proliferation of manifestations and revelations (i.e. dreams, visions, theurgy), naturally pointed to the forces beyond or behind such demonstrations. With many cults and ethnic groups came many gods. Perhaps this reality is reflected most poignantly in the writings of the second-century satirist, Lucian of Samosata. In *The Parliament of the Gods*, Lucian constructs a fictional assemblage of various traditional gods who gather to discuss the unprecedented increase of their ranks. Momus, the personification of satire, is in dialogue with Zeus when the former claims, '...at present, oracles are delivered by every stone and every altar that is drenched with oil and has garlands and can provide itself with a charlatan – of whom there are plenty.'<sup>16</sup> This predicament of excessive and dubious rites is only a function of the related problem: excessive and dubious deities. Thus, Momus proposes that, in the case of these 'aliens' and 'barbarians' who have fraudulently come 'to be accounted gods' and have caused 'a noisy rabble of polyglot flotsam', their 'images be pulled down and those of Zeus or Hera or Apollo or one of the others be substituted.'<sup>17</sup> Lucian, then, not only demonstrates the pluralism of the period but also the dichotomy between traditional and novel/foreign gods.

Although such a distinction was inevitable in an environment that venerated longevity and historical continuity, it did not necessarily lead to outright rejection of the less familiar deities. Anderson supports this observation with a passage from Maximus of Tyre:

The Celts worship Zeus, but their image of him is a tall oak-tree. The Paeonians worship the Sun, but the Paeonian image of it is a tiny disk on top of a long pole. The Arabs worship a god, but which one I do not know; I have seen their image, a square stone. The Paphians worship Aphrodite; but their image of her you would compare most accurately to a white pyramid of an unknown substance. To the Lycians their mount Olympus sends forth fire, not like the fire of Etna, but unthreatening and under control; and this fire serves both as their temple and image. The Phrygians around Celaenae honour two

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<sup>16</sup> Lucian, *Lucian in Eight Volumes*, Volume 5, Loeb Classical Library, eds. T.E. Page, E. Capps, W.H.D. Rouse, L.A. Post, and E.H. Warmington (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1962), 433.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 439, 441.

rivers, the Marsyas and the Meander...What a profusion, what a variety of images!<sup>18</sup>

Here, another writer of the second century highlights the pluralism and proliferation of gods represented throughout the Roman Empire. In response to this quotation, Anderson notes that Maximus seems to ‘accept the integration or equivalence of Greek and foreign deities.’ Accordingly, it is a difficult task to uncover the motivations behind the persecution of a single religious group within this pluralistic context. Though there is little doubt that the Graeco-Roman world was one of multifarious religious beliefs, cults, and posited supernatural beings; it is also apparent that this familiarity with diversity did little to quell religious violence or selective intolerance.

One eminent scholar of early Christian history notes that Rome sometimes chose to suppress new religious movements by claiming criminal activity.<sup>19</sup> This was certainly one way in which Romans framed the gripe they had with Christianity. Later, the various accusations raised against the Christians will be discussed in some depth as a combined form of societal and doctrinal heresy. The Roman Empire, as the antecedent of modern western democracies, was guided both by religious currents and political fortitude. It was unique, however, in that the two created synergy by coexisting as an intertwined singularity. We learn from Tacitus that Christians received ruthless persecution at the hands of Nero in the mid-first century; however, it was the second century that witnessed multiple cases of Christian persecution as the direct result of a perceived threat that Christianity might destabilise this religio-political equilibrium.<sup>20</sup> Thus, a conspicuous element of the second-century setting is the manner by which the Romans dealt with small religious movements, particularly Christianity, whilst maintaining the advantageous balance between the *pax romana* and the *pax deorum*.

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<sup>18</sup> Anderson, 144.

<sup>19</sup> Ste Croix, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals: The Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero*, Translated by J.C. Yardley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.44; G.E.M. De Ste Croix, ‘Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?’, *Past and Present* 26 (November 1963): 7. Also, Ste Croix mentions that the persecutions prior to the Nero event in 64CE were typically very small and the result of hostility between Jews and Christians.

As local Christian communities grew in size and influence, local authorities found themselves without clear recourse. On the one hand, Christianity promulgated familiar values such as passive suffering and justice; the veneration of Christ's crucifixion appearing compatible with the moral outlook of Greek literature in which heroes chose virtue (thus, suffering) over vice (acquiescence).<sup>21</sup> For example, Aeschylus' Agamemnon describes the gain one receives in death as a 'learning through suffering', *πάθει μάθος*.<sup>22</sup> This is not only congruent with early notions of Christ's atoning sacrifice but is directly related to our later exploration of the soteriological self, the individual identity located within the soteriological schema whose experience of heresy finds significance and redemption in personal progression.

After full consideration, however, the second-century Roman proconsuls also recognised that the Christians possessed a number of confounding concepts such as the notion that the supreme deity was the only deity and had, in fact, created the universe *ex nihilo*. Such an idea explicitly challenged convention and tradition.<sup>23</sup> The novelty of the movement was diluted by their obvious ties to Judaism. Although that connection had been severed, the Christians embraced their independence whilst also claiming historical continuity with the faith of the Hebrews. In the environment of the second century, tradition was the test of true religion; innovation amounted to denial of history.<sup>24</sup> For Romans who knew little more than this, the Christians were puzzling. In the early years of the second century, as Tacitus was recounting the ignoble use of Christians as a scapegoat by Nero, a governor in Bithynia expressed this confusion to the emperor Trajan and, in doing so, provided subsequent generations with a glimpse into the nature of the animosity felt toward early Christians.

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<sup>21</sup> Gregory J. Riley, 'Mimesis of Classical Ideas in the Second Christian Century,' *Mimesis and Intertextuality*, ed. Dennis MacDonald (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 95, 98, 101-02. Riley discusses the harmony between Greek legends such as Herakles and Agamemnon with Christian ideals introduced in writers like Paul and Justin.

<sup>22</sup> George C. W. Warr, trans., *The Oresteia of Aeschylus* (London: George Allen, 1900), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Wilken, 90-91. Wilken states that the belief in creation *ex nihilo* (developed during the second century) implied that the Creator operated outside the bounds of the cosmos, an unfamiliar and potentially upsetting suggestion for the Greeks and Romans. It is interesting to note that Mormonism would revisit this connection between creation versus formation and its corollaries with regards to cosmological laws and the ontological separation between deity and humanity.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

### *Christian Persecution/Martyrdom*

Serving as a provincial governor, Pliny wrote to Trajan describing his immersion in the active prosecution of Christians but is undeniably uncertain about the legal protocol for such matters. In fact, Pliny admits his own confoundedness over the legality of the name *Christianus* and whether it is that name, *quod faterentur* (their admissions), or their *inflexibilem obstinationem* (unflinching obstinacy) that is to be punished.<sup>25</sup> Pliny's remarks are instructive for our future discussion of the Roman attempts to categorise Christianity, but they also offer an insightful entry to the topic of Christian persecution/martyrdom in the second century. Who were these superstitious rabble-rousers? Why did they exhibit such inflexibility with regards to established tradition? Though Pliny's procedure of affording accused Christians multiple opportunities to renounce their membership in the cult before sentencing them to death received Trajan's approval, there was no empire-wide method for trying Christians during the early years of the century. Indeed, Trajan's successor Hadrian appears to have attempted such a measure by composing a rescript demanding that Christians be given a court trial and receive punishment according to the crimes proven to have been committed.<sup>26</sup> In spite of this effort, however, little uniformity was achieved concerning the persecution of Christians. Persecution was not officially sanctioned by Rome until the reign of Decius in the third century, and thus ambiguity surrounded the preferred means by which Roman authorities were to deal with the growing population of Christians.

This Christian conundrum fell somewhere outside of the bounds of legal precedence, not only because of the movement's origins from within the Jewish areas of the empire rather than without, but also because the Christians presented a somewhat unparalleled case. For instance, the Christians did not yield to or retreat from Roman power like other cults (e.g., the Druids), they rarely rebelled against the

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<sup>25</sup> Pliny, *Letters and Panegyricus: Volume II*, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. E.H. Warmington (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1969), 10.96; Ste Croix, 18-31; A.N. Sherwin-White, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? – An Amendment,' *Past and Present* 27 (1964): 23-7; and G.E.M. De Ste Croix, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? – A Rejoinder,' *Past and Present* 27 (1964): 28-33. It is worth noting that Ste Croix and Sherwin-White engaged in a well known debate concerning the nature of the accusations made against Christians. The former believed the accusation rested on the name itself, whereas Sherwin-White believed it was the obstinacy that was denounced.

<sup>26</sup> Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, ed. Andrew Louth (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 4.9

empire, they demonstrated an overt interest in classical culture, and it was difficult to determine whether their ecclesiastical organisation offered a ‘rival or a subsidiary structure’ to the state.<sup>27</sup> At times, the various provincial authorities decided that the Christians posed a threat to the established order, and persecution ensued. Given the explication of what we have called the heretical process in the previous chapter, it might be expected that these moments of persecution (or reception, in our terms) led to corresponding instances of recognition. Said differently, the reception of intense social heresy, if we are correct, should engender an episode during which the taken-for-granted is brought to the surface and reinterpreted in the light of new knowledge. For Christians of the second century, this transition from reception to recognition is encapsulated by their eventual understanding of persecution as martyrdom.<sup>28</sup> By the historical period with which the present study is concerned, Christians had begun to display an irrational zeal for martyrdom.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Irenaeus and others can draw from the Christ of the Gospels and profess the necessity of tribulation for believers; the persecution leads to their being ‘fitted for the royal banquet.’<sup>30</sup>

In the following pages, martyrdom as an interpretive apparatus in the face of personal heresy is explored further, particularly in reference to the manner by which complex soteriologies incorporate the suffering into a meaning-system. Here, however, it is sufficient to note that martyrdom was a Christian means of facing death and resisting Roman power that came into its own during the latter half of the first century and the first half of the second.<sup>31</sup> The term *μάρτυς/μάρτυρος* (martus/marturos) originally meant ‘witness’. Its transformation into the laudable

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<sup>27</sup> Momigliano, 197.

<sup>28</sup> Though it is beyond the scope of this study, the link between convictions and a willingness to die for them is explored from a sociological point of view in: Eugene Weiner and Anita Weiner, *The Martyr’s Conviction* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990). Weiner and Weiner offer a fascinating study of martyrdom and the plausibility structures necessary for its sustained viability.

<sup>29</sup> Bowersock, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *AH*, V.28.2

<sup>31</sup> Bowersock, 5 & 7. There has been scholarly debate about the uniqueness of Christian martyrdom and its dates of origin. Some, like Ste Croix (*Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, 19), do not agree that martyrdom was a novel approach to death engendered by Christians, preferring to see direct antecedents in Jewish literature such as the Maccabees. Bowersock cogently argues, however, that Christians primarily took their cue from the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 as well as the story of Antipas in Revelation 2 in order to reinterpret death at the hands of Roman authority. Perhaps it is best simply to concede that martyrdom came to designate a uniquely Christian category by the period with which we are chiefly concerned.

descriptor for an individual who has died for the sake of Christianity was abetted by mingling the values of the classical world and the inevitable association made between the message shared by those persecuted and their resultant deaths. Carole Straw incisively articulates the consequent potency of this formula:

Consonant with the classical honour code and its ideal of the good death, a martyr's confrontation with death distilled the essence of his or her actions and worth. A martyr's feelings of control over death and torture – the voluntary, even eager acceptance of condemnation – transformed the sordid ordeals one suffered into a most honourable vindication...Precisely, and paradoxically, because suffering was so contemptible when imposed against one's will, it became all the more glorious and stunning when embraced actively with the will.<sup>32</sup>

This, Straw avers, ultimately leads to this sort of equation: 'volition = honour = death = proof of authenticity.'<sup>33</sup> In this way, the martyr is a witness in that he or she bears testimony to an authentic message. Straw is careful to concede that this same equation applies to classical heroes who 'make a *devotio*' but argues that the Christian martyrs altered the *telos* of the honourable death by shifting attention away from themselves and on to 'the sanctity of suffering itself.'<sup>34</sup>

### *Jewish Opposition*

Such suffering was not solely at the hands of pagans, however. A complete assessment of Christianity in the second century must address the increasingly strained relations between Christians and Jews. Jack Sanders notes that the Bar Kokhba revolt, in which Jews challenged Roman authority around 132 C.E., resulted in the ultimate detachment of 'Jewish Christians' from 'non-Christian Jews'.<sup>35</sup> This divergence, though arguably inevitable, was far from entirely amicable; Jews and Christians continued negotiating the boundary between their two communities even as the latter began to draw additional lines between themselves and pagans. Elsewhere Sanders notes that the 'heretics' mentioned in the Deutero-Pauline letter to the

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<sup>32</sup> Carol Straw, 'Martyrdom in its Classical Context,' *Sacrificing the Self*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 40.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>35</sup> Jack T. Sanders, 'Establishing Social Distance between Christians and Both Jews and Pagans,' *The Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches*, eds. Anthony J. Blasi, Paul-André Turcotte, and Jean Duhaime (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2002), 361.

Colossians are Jewish Christians, and a certain degree of animosity existed between the Gentile Christians and their Jewish peers due to the different opinions regarding Jewish practices such as circumcision and the avoidance of unclean food.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, the first century witnessed an embryonic divide that reached fruition by the early second century.

The line separating insider from outsider solidified as pressure mounted and time passed. The 'deviant insider' changed rather rapidly into the external other. Justin's words cited below, however, indicate that the nature of the opposition remained unaltered. The same cannot be said for the location of the heresy. This is important to note as our survey eventually turns to early Mormonism, a group whose most keen enemies consisted of disaffiliated members.

As for relations between Christians and Jews in the second century, sources from the period indicate not only the existence of an appreciable rift but overt hostility. Justin, for instance, writes that the Jews of his day consider Christians to be enemies; he accuses the Jews of attempting to murder Christians whenever possible. Bar Kokhba, the leader of the Jewish uprising mentioned above, Justin recalls, also turned his aggression toward Christians during the coup, pressuring the latter to renounce their belief in Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>37</sup> Such doctrinal heresy incited the personal heresy; Justin reveals that the disagreement over the status of Jesus as well as incongruity in the understanding of circumcision's relevance caused the Jews to curse Christians during the ritual activities within the synagogues, and the apologist charges the Jews with causing greater injury to Christianity than any other group.<sup>38</sup> Writing very early in the third century, Hippolytus similarly claims that Jews are as culpable as pagans in overtly opposing and attempting to harm Christianity.<sup>39</sup> He accuses the

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<sup>36</sup> Jack T. Sanders, 'Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire: A Conversation with Rodney Stark,' *Sociological Analysis* 53.4(1992): 442.

<sup>37</sup> Justin, *The First Apology*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 16 & 17. The 'curse' mentioned by Justin is probably the *birkat ha-minim*, or 'blessing on the heretics', a component of the *Amidah* prayer recited three times per day.

<sup>39</sup> Hippolytus, *Commentaire Sur Daniel*, Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 14, eds. H. de Lubac and J. Daniélou (Paris: Cerf, 1947), 1.15.2; Photius, *Bibliotheca*, ed. John Henry Freese (New York: Macmillan, 1920) codex 121. Photius, a Patriarch of Constantinople during the ninth century, describes Hippolytus as a disciple of Irenaeus, but many scholars consider this assertion spurious.



Jews of 'wishing to bear false testimonies against' the Christians and identifies his opponents as those mentioned in Galatians 2:4.<sup>40</sup>

From an outside perspective, the two parties seemed to be legitimately at odds. Celsus, a pagan philosopher and contemporary of Justin and Irenaeus, repeatedly highlights the tension caused by Christianity's attempt to balance an appeal to Jewish roots alongside an innovative system of scriptures and beliefs.<sup>41</sup> Celsus' work serves as an instructive and illuminating example of the pagan perception of Christians during this time. As the investigation progresses into the realm of social and doctrinal opposition, Celsus provides insight into the particularities of the threat Christianity posed to the empire. This sect, fully severed from Judaism, represented approximately 0.08% of the empire's population by the mid-second century.<sup>42</sup> Even so, the group embodied one of Rome's greatest fears: social subversion in the form of a destabilisation of the precarious balance struck in the empire between religion and polity. Thus, the majority strove to alienate the threatening minority, struggling to define and confine the nascent movement by any number of means.

### **Societal and Doctrinal Heresy**

It is admittedly problematic to delineate between societal, doctrinal, and personal forms of religious opposition. Although doing so can provide useful insight into the social processes at play on the early development of a religious community, the challenge becomes impossible when endeavouring to separate societal from doctrinal in the Graeco-Roman context. The two realms, social and religious, existed as an indivisible marriage.<sup>43</sup> This is apparent in the concept of the *pax deorum*. The gods were to be appeased; were to be pacified by the diligent ritual practices of Rome and its citizens. To fail in this duty was to risk upsetting the harmony of society, the agreement between divinity and humanity.

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<sup>40</sup> Hippolytus, 1.15.2. Galatians 2:4 says, 'This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.'

<sup>41</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, translated by Henry Chadwick (London: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 2.1, 4, 11, 28; 7.18

<sup>42</sup> Wilken, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Wilken, 52. For example, Wilken observes that in Tacitus' attack on Judaism 'social and religious judgments are intimately related to one another.'

Divine wrath, of course, was the feared repercussion of impiety. It is difficult to declare with certainty the degree to which Roman citizens truly believed the supernatural claims associated with their religious rites. Members of the educated classes probably displayed a range of belief, some representing a sort of henotheism and some simply adhering to tradition because of the social cohesion enabled by doing so.<sup>44</sup> What is clear, however, is that events such as natural disasters were often attributed to immorality or ritual noncompliance. Tertullian claims that his fellow Christians are blamed for ‘every harmful setback of the people’, including famine or plague.<sup>45</sup> Once again, the relativity of such claims becomes apparent. The pagans about whom Tertullian writes certainly understood Christians to be irreligious and recalcitrant, following their own novel ideas rather than the established orthopraxy. Yet, two Christian emperors of the fifth century, Theodosius II and Valentinian III, felt that it was their duty to pursue ‘true religion’ and echoed the early pagans when attributing poor weather and diminished crops to the *Christian* god’s wrath in response to *pagan* practices.<sup>46</sup> Time and circumstance inverted the conflict, but the notion that divine anger should be expected to result from the misdeeds of the religiously heretical remained unaffected.

Young and ostensibly unfettered movements forced a reaction from the greater society, a responsive attempt to categorise the new group, understand their beliefs, and measure the significance of their socio-political threat. It is useful to note that, whereas historian Glen Bowersock tends to emphasise the *pax deorum* and its stabilising role in Graeco-Roman society, Arnaldo Momigliano locates social cohesion primarily within the attendant rituals and practices of the imperial cult.<sup>47</sup> Christianity, however, was a threat to both, as the two elements of that particular culture were intertwined. To decry the efficacy of ritual piety, directed toward the

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<sup>44</sup> Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 35. Clark states that the philosophically trained Romans were not truly polytheistic but ‘henotheistic’, believing that one supreme deity presided over lesser gods.

<sup>45</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, The Loeb Classical Library, eds. T.E. Page, E. Capps, and W.H.D. Rouse (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1931), 40.1-2: ‘...*omnis popularis incommode Christianos esse in causam. Si Tiberis ascendit in moenia, so Nilus non ascendit in arva, si caelum stetit, si terra movit, si fames, si lues, statim Christianos ad leonem ! adclamatur.*’

<sup>46</sup> Ste Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, 207. The understanding of piety and its socially stabilising effects present in the Graeco-Roman world will be discussed further as a single example of the accusations concerning social subversion leveled against Christians during this period.

<sup>47</sup> Momigliano, 96.

gods or the emperor, was to undermine crucial social scaffolding. In the eyes of pagans, groups that exhibited such subversive propensities were not necessarily religious. They could be political, or they might be superstitious. Within a setting that reserved the term 'religion' only for those communities in possession of an evident tradition, groups were more likely to earn the appellation 'cult' or 'magic' than almost anything else. For second-century Christians, this was unequivocally the case. As their numbers grew, so did outsiders' efforts to define this new religious movement.

### *Appellations and Categories: The Struggle to Define Christianity*

As previously mentioned, the Romans saw a clear distinction between the ritual devotion and historical depth of religion on the one hand, and the groundless innovations of superstition on the other. The former involved *pietas* (piety), but the latter was taken to be baseless and void of such active dedication.<sup>48</sup> The idioms and categories available to those in the Roman Empire not only included religion and superstition but also society, cult, philosophical school, and others. During the second century, Christianity confounded many pagan writers. As a result, various terms were applied to the group, each one meant to underscore a certain element of the perceived threat posed by such a young and inventive community.

Tacitus, recounting the grave actions of Nero, describes the Christians as belonging to a 'destructive superstition'.<sup>49</sup> Tacitus' contemporary during the early years of the century, the aforementioned governor Pliny, utilises multiple terms in his efforts to place Christianity. He calls them a cult or superstition but also implies that they fit the description of a political society.<sup>50</sup> These societies were associations of likeminded individuals, often gathering with common political agendas. In Robert Wilken's words, such societies were 'social, recreational, and religious.'<sup>51</sup> He asserts that the closest parallel for the Christianity of this period is found in the Bacchic

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<sup>48</sup> Wilken, 60.

<sup>49</sup> Tacitus, 15.44. He specifically calls them an *exitiabilis superstitio*.

<sup>50</sup> Pliny, 10.96. In addition to *superstitio*, Pliny notes that some of the Christians had ceased to assemble after an edict was issued banning all political societies.

<sup>51</sup> Wilken, 34.

Society of the late second century.<sup>52</sup> This *hetaeria* (society) met together regularly to hear speeches, pay dues, perform rites involving wine, assist with one another's expenses (particularly with burial costs when a member died), and sing hymns. Wilken adds, 'Like the followers of Heracles who were called Heraclists, the devotees of Asclepius called Asclepiasts, or the followers of Isis called Isiacs, the Christians were called *Christiani*.'<sup>53</sup> From the outsider's vantage, then, the Christians appeared to fit a certain mould.

This simple categorisation, however, collapsed under the load of Christian success and sophisticated reasoning. Although Celsus, composing his philosophical assault around 170 C.E., describes the Christians as a 'secret society' which promotes 'magic' based on the example set by the 'sorcerer' Jesus;<sup>54</sup> other writers found it a bit more challenging to situate the Christians by the last few decades of this century. It is interesting to read Tertullian's early third-century compromise that takes Christians to be a 'society (*corpus*) with shared religious understanding.'<sup>55</sup> Yet it is perhaps more valuable to observe the shift that had already occurred before Tertullian.

Galen, a doctor and philosopher whose career eventually deposited him in Rome, was born around 130 C.E. in Asia Minor. Therefore, his context closely resembles that of Irenaeus who was also born around the same year and in the same region of the empire. Galen's treatment of Christianity during this period presents an alternative to the polemical and confused voices already discussed. For Galen, Christianity and Judaism represent schools that, though deluded, come close to the moral stature of true philosophers.<sup>56</sup> Although Galen is ultimately critical of the irrationality of Christians and Jews, his ascription of the term 'school' to these communities betrays a certain degree of acceptance that is absent from Tacitus, Pliny, and Celsus. The latter does, however, chastise Jews for leaving their established

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>54</sup> Origen, 1.6; 8.17; 8.41

<sup>55</sup> Tertullian, 39.1

<sup>56</sup> Wilken, 69; R. Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 56-9; A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 167-80.

tradition for ‘another life’ (Christianity).<sup>57</sup> It could be argued, then, that Celsus also views Christianity as an optional way of life. Either way, the delineation between a philosophically-inclined school and superstition is an important one. Scholar of late antiquity, Arthur Nock, astutely notes that ‘turning from luxury and self-indulgence and superstition to a life of discipline and sometimes to a life of contemplation’ is the hallmark of converting to philosophy.<sup>58</sup> Even more illuminating is Nock’s response to the question of Greek philosophy’s importance in later centuries of Graeco-Roman culture:

Why did these schools hold so dominant a place in the spiritual history of the succeeding centuries? Firstly, they offered intelligible explanations of phenomena...Secondly – and this is a point of cardinal importance – the schools offered a life with a scheme.<sup>59</sup>

Consequently, if Christianity was a school of thought, then it ventured beyond the inane and into the meaningful ordering of existence for its members. Galen may signal a turning point of sorts wherein Christians experienced a greater degree of social acceptance. Even if the Christian ‘school’ meant that pagans no longer viewed the new movement as an alien disturbance, it did not prevent further opposition.

If one recalls the original definition of heresy as the choice to join a competing school of thought, Galen’s comments serve both to lend credence to Christianity whilst implicitly labelling the movement heretical. Indeed, pagan efforts to define Christians were thinly veiled struggles to stifle what was perceived to be an agonistic force. Relying on established social types, non-Christians engaged in name-calling *en masse*. The nicknames and appellations were offensive in and of themselves, highlighting the lack of historical grounding and the conspicuous excess of delusion. If Christianity signified anything, it was the propensity for credulous individuals to find solidarity in their common predicaments and fatuous myths. For those on the inside, though, their camaraderie was abetted by the belief that Christianity was, in fact, a philosophical way of life. Seeds of truth were to be discovered in Greek thought, certainly, but the ultimate truth was voiced by the community of believers. For many outsiders, Christianity remained less a competing way of life and more a

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<sup>57</sup> Origen, 2.1

<sup>58</sup> Nock, 179.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 167.

shallow superstition that appeared to add nothing of value to the conventional (thus, proven) civil religion of the empire.

Though the topic is addressed more thoroughly in the succeeding chapter, one should take note of the fact that Christians responded to these attacks. Not only did apologists such as Justin or Origen (in countering Celsus) explicitly refute the accusations and misinformed haranguing of Christianity's opponents, but figures such as Irenaeus sought to resolve many of the problems born from the opposition faced during this period. Those who denied Christianity the status of religion on the grounds that it lacked adequate history inadvertently contributed to the establishment of a soteriological schema in which narrative receives pride of place and believers are resolutely linked to the community's historical *telos*. Likewise, specific arguments such as Celsus' assertion that the god of the Jews is incompatible with the god of the Christians find ready rebuttals in the writings of those who, like Irenaeus, expend great energy to express both the unequivocal compatibility (indeed, unity) of the two gods as well as the manner by which that single deity created a complex plan for the world.<sup>60</sup> As will be explored later, the Christians came to articulate such plans as schemas or narratives of salvation. If philosophical schools offered 'life with a scheme', Christianity certainly assumed its rightful place alongside such 'ways of life' as it came to incorporate the agonistic influences encountered in the empire into its belief system and meta-narrative.

From a different perspective, however, it was precisely this alternative way of life that concerned many Romans. Plutarch argued that superstition ultimately led to atheism, for the former posited erroneous notions about the gods which, by pulling the mind further from the noble truth of philosophy, ultimately left the individual stranded and without any true concept or need of deities.<sup>61</sup> Naturally, atheism worried the pagans. In the complex religious system of the empire, maintaining an allegiance to one's own private deities was common and acceptable; however, religious devotion had to be divided between those objects of private loyalty and the obligatory rites of Roman tradition. When the former overshadowed or fully precluded the latter, problems arose. Thus, accusations regarding the piety and ritual practices of

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<sup>60</sup> For Celsus, see Origen, 7.18; As for Irenaeus, we have in mind his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* in which he argues for the unity of the Jewish god and that intimated by the writings of the apostles.

<sup>61</sup> Wilken, 61.

Christians existed alongside discursive attacks on the religious legitimacy of this up and coming group.

### *Social Subversion: Accusations against Christians*

Social subversion may be understood as the upending of society's established/stabilising norms, and, in the particular case of second-century Christianity, the subversive behaviours for which they received resistance encompass both social and doctrinal heresy. In other words, Christian practices and choices appeared rebellious because they undermined social *and* religious harmony. As stated above, the two elements of society were closely intertwined, and Christian transgressions in one area could prove detrimental in the other. Ostensibly, Christianity encouraged people to 'abandon ancestral customs and break the sacred bonds of family, society, and nation.'<sup>62</sup> In Pliny's address to Trajan, a related problem is mentioned.<sup>63</sup> Christians, due to their waxing influence, are blamed for a decrease in the sales of shrines and sacrificial meats intended for use in the temples.<sup>64</sup> Accusations extended beyond such economic complications. During the second century alone, Christians were charged with criminal activity, religious impiety, and outright atheism. Historian A.N. Sherwin-White sees a gradual shift during the period in the angle of attack; opponents changed from focusing on the *flagitia* (crimes) of the Christians to highlighting the group's 'godlessness'.<sup>65</sup> Keeping in mind the unassailable ties between the *flagitia* and the more overtly religious offences, we turn our attention to the former, separating the multitude of accusations into smaller categories only to aid our analysis.

Claims of criminal activity levied against religious assemblages were common in the empire. As mentioned previously, this was one method employed by Rome for suppressing unwanted superstitions.<sup>66</sup> In the case of Christianity, the charges

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<sup>62</sup> Pagels, 114.

<sup>63</sup> Pliny, 10.96

<sup>64</sup> For additional information see Robert M. Grant, *Gods and the One God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 27-8. Grant believes that this refers to the temple of Artemis.

<sup>65</sup> Sherwin-White, 24.

<sup>66</sup> At the same time, suppression could occur without specific offences cited. See Clifford Ando, ed., *Roman Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 199-219.

included repugnant activities such as anthropophagy (cannibalism) and incest. These Thyestean feasts and covert instances of Oedipodean intercourse, respectively, were denied by Justin in the middle of the century. In his apologetical writings, Justin goes beyond simply denying the criminal charges and appeals to Hadrian's rescript for fair legal treatment of those accused.<sup>67</sup> Arguing for diversity among those who are called 'Christians', Justin claims that the various 'heretics' may commit such crimes, but the 'true' Christians do not.<sup>68</sup> Throughout much of his writings, these specific accusations are refuted and deflected. A sense of injustice pervades his pleas as Christians are not only falsely accused but unfairly convicted.

By Tertullian's time a few decades later, pagan claims remained unchanged. In his *Apology*, Tertullian echoes Justin, albeit with a more indignant tone. He lists the same charges brought against Christians, denies them, pleads for justice, and asserts the dubiousness of the allegations.<sup>69</sup> For the Christians, though, these criminal acts comprised only a portion of pagan resistance. In fact, the purported criminality of Christianity was supplemented by more explicitly religious challenges. To engage in secret rites was one thing, but to eschew the obligatory public rites was too much for Rome. In this way, then, the full spectrum of Christian behaviour became the target of societal and doctrinal heresy.

Impiety and atheism were believed to be closely related, barely distinct from one another on the spectrum of social misbehaviour. Thus, in a text such as *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, one encounters numerous invocations of 'atheism' by those opposing the Christian Polycarp as well as their assertion that Polycarp 'teaches many not to sacrifice or worship.'<sup>70</sup> That agonistic audience understood the refusal of ritual participation in terms of atheism; to save one's allegiance solely for the one God was to slight the entire pantheon. The martyrdom account describes those in attendance as both Jewish and pagan, and their anger toward Polycarp and the community he represented was provoked by the Christian leader's refusal to 'swear by the genius of

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<sup>67</sup> Justin, *The First Apology*, 7; *The Second Apology*, 12.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., *The First Apology*, 26.

<sup>69</sup> Tertullian, 2, 4, and 7.

<sup>70</sup> 'Martyrdom of Polycarp,' *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 3, 9, and 12.



Caesar'.<sup>71</sup> Such stubborn atheism, then, not only betrayed a disregard for social convention but contained the potential to incite the gods.

As previously indicated, divine wrath was assumed to be the potent repercussion of botched religious responsibility. Failing to pay tribute to the gods amounted to disrespecting them. Punishment could be expected as the just recompense for such dishonour. A late second-century tablet from Lydia illustrates this type of causal relationship in the collective religious consciousness of the empire:

Because Ioukoundos fell into a condition of insanity and it was noised abroad by all that he had been put under a spell by his mother-in-law Tatia, she set up a sceptre and placed curses in the temple in order to defend herself against what was being said about her, having suffered such a state of conscience. The gods sent punishment on her which she did not escape. Likewise also her son Socrates was passing the entrance that leads down to the sacred grove and carrying a vine-dressing sickle and it dropped on his foot and thus destruction came upon him in a single day's punishment. Therefore great are the gods of Axiottenos.<sup>72</sup>

Here, one observes the logical formula whereby one unwelcomed religious act produces a penal response from the local deities. To behave fecklessly with regards to the religious was seen as despicable; yet, we should recognise the relativity inherent in this sort of religious conflict. Heresy, or social opposition, has no sole owner. For the pagans of this period, the Christians represented heresy, and vice versa. The issue of piety was central to the matter. This is observed in Eunapius' retelling of a prophecy supposedly given by Antonius in the second century predicting the destruction of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 391 C.E. In this account, the Christians are said to be as 'men in their outward appearance but like swine in their lifestyle' who 'consider this as an act of piety, to despise what was divine.'<sup>73</sup>

'Despising the divine' was more than rhetoric or unfounded polemic. Given the nature of Graeco-Roman culture, it was almost inevitable that charges of *flagitia* combined with questions of *pietas* and led to a collective form of trepidation over the seeming want of any religiosity at all among the Christians. Perhaps Plutarch was correct; Christian impiety engendered atheism. This, at least, was the view of many

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>72</sup> J.G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), no.137.

<sup>73</sup> Cited in Anderson, 159.

non-Christians. Celsus, for example, decries the Christian apathy toward religious rites and claims that these individuals blaspheme the gods.<sup>74</sup> What is more, argues Celsus, is that the Christians refuse to ‘swear by the genius of the Emperor.’<sup>75</sup>

Polycarp was certainly presented with the opportunity to save himself by producing such an oblation, and he chose death.<sup>76</sup> Justin acknowledges the charge of atheism but unashamedly defends the Christians’ abstention from the state religion and emperor-cult.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, Tertullian admits that Christians do not swear by the *genios* of Caesar but *ita per salute eorum* (‘by his health’); a prayer that Tertullian believes to be strong evidence of Christian devotion to the empire.<sup>78</sup>

Those opposing Christianity, however, were not always convinced by such reasoning. In the veneration of Jesus, antagonists like Celsus saw an incontrovertible attempt to undermine the unity of God. This doctrinal issue quickly transformed into a social argument as Celsus proceeded; worshipping Jesus, he maintained, might lead to the overthrow of the emperor.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the specific nature of Christian belief intersected with the social subversion this new movement was thought to embody. If they did not pledge an oath to Caesar’s genius, then to what *did* they profess loyalty? Could Christian belief blend with Graeco-Roman religious understanding?

#### *Apo-theosis and the One God*

In an environment so utterly immersed in philosophical tradition and civil religion, the notion of understanding, or rationality, was paramount. If Christianity purported to be more than a superstition, it needed to substantiate such a claim. Those defending the Christians, like Tertullian, often affirmed belief in the unity of God. In fact, Tertullian’s justification for supporting the emperors stems from his faith in the ultimate sovereignty of the one, true God.<sup>80</sup> Even so, various elements of Christian

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<sup>74</sup> Origen, 8.38-9, 8.55

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8.65

<sup>76</sup> ‘Martyrdom of Polycarp,’ 8-10.

<sup>77</sup> Justin, *The First Apology*, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Tertullian, 32.2, 35.10

<sup>79</sup> Origen, 8.68; Wilken, 108.

<sup>80</sup> Tertullian, 32.

doctrine baffled outsiders. At various points in his text, Celsus questions the logic of believing in Jesus' incarnation, the possibility of resurrection, and the sincerity of Christians who profess monotheism.<sup>81</sup> Christians, he asserts, suffer from sedition in their lack of reason.<sup>82</sup> Not only is it unthinkable that God could change in order to become incarnate, thus contravening the accepted Platonic view of divine immutability, but Christians offer no cogent response to logical challenges. Their only retort, according to Celsus, is that everything is possible with God.<sup>83</sup>

Once again, Celsus provides an instructive example of the doctrinal and societal heresies facing second-century Christians. His onslaught, although potentially seen as harsh, is not unfounded. Positing doctrines such as the ability of God to become human or the supernatural resurrection of Jesus explicitly contradicted many of the common views of metaphysics and deity. Even *creatio ex nihilo*, a developing belief during this time, offended the Greek tradition of pre-existent souls and, accordingly, appeared irrational.<sup>84</sup> It is very important to acknowledge that the doctrinal tension experienced by the Christians also came from competing, but equally marginal, sects. Often, these other sects (sometimes called 'Christian') attempted to ameliorate the incongruity between traditional, philosophical understandings and novel perspectives.

The present analysis of this period centres on the figure of Irenaeus; therefore, one would be remiss not to mention 'Gnosticism' as one front in the heretical battle. Irenaeus wrote his entire five-volume *Against Heresies* in response to the teachings of various 'Gnostic' groups, and his articulation of a soteriological schema owes much of its inspiration to his drive to resolve the apparently counterfeit confessions of these opponents.<sup>85</sup> Primarily, Irenaeus sought to decry the tenets of Valentinianism, a

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<sup>81</sup> Origen, 4.2, 4.14, 5.14, 8.12, 8.14

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 8.49

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 5.14

<sup>84</sup> Irenaeus champions this understanding of creation and quotes *The Shepherd of Hermas* (also second century) for support. This issue later touched Mormons as well in their attempts to reconcile Smith's teachings with traditional Christian creedal formulations. For Irenaeus on this as well as the relationship of *creatio ex nihilo* to both his and Mormonism's varieties of deification, see Adam J. Powell, 'The Species Debate: God and Humanity in Irenaeus and the Latter-day Saints,' *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 5(2012): 64-80.

<sup>85</sup> For Gnosticism, see Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); John D. Turner and Ruth Majercik, eds., *Gnosticism and Later Platonism*, SBL Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); Robert McQueen Grant, *Gnosticism*

‘Gnostic’ sect which gained popularity in the western regions of the empire during this time.<sup>86</sup> Valentinus, and his pupil Ptolemy, constructed a somewhat convoluted cosmology in which Greek philosophy was blended with Christian discourse. The result was a system of divine emanations, all traceable back to the one Bythos (Forefather). The lowest of these was the Demiurge who created matter, but there was also a role for Logos, Ekklesia, Sophia, and even Christ, Truth, and the Holy Spirit. In this manner, then, these ‘Gnostics’ developed a more syncretistic system that, at least in part, borrowed from the popular structure of henotheism.

Perhaps one could argue then that the most threatening belief espoused by those Christians who would emerge over the next couple of centuries as ‘orthodoxy’ was one of its most unassuming: monotheism. The notion of a supreme deity was actually quite familiar to a milieu steeped in henotheistic ideas. Yet, Christianity seemed to want to disabuse Romans of their certainty that the lesser gods existed at all. When a Christian professed faith in the ‘one, true God’, he or she literally intended not to express loyalty to any other entity. This antipathy toward other supposedly divine beings also extended to the emperor, as we have already shown. In Graeco-Roman culture, heroes deserved honour. It was not uncommon for these noble individuals to be immortalised in the minds of others. This bestowal of god-like esteem extended both to exceptional, but relatively unknown, figures as well as to emperors. A story from the second century, for instance, tells of a ‘rustic child of nature in the Athenian hinterland who comes to be regarded as a Heracles or Marathon-style hero to whom offerings may be made (and who detects impure ones by means of his supernatural powers).’<sup>87</sup> Here, one encounters an account of a mortal receiving a degree of divinity from those in the local area. This form of deification is precisely the type afforded emperors and highlights the sacralising tendency in the earliest societies of the Common Era.

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and *Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Alastair H. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996). We refer to ‘Gnosticism’ rather than Gnosticism (see Ch.1 Note 16).

<sup>86</sup> Pearson, 145.

<sup>87</sup> Anderson, 148. Story told by Herodes Atticus in Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* (London: Heinemann, 1922), 2.1

When this sort of *apotheosis* occurred within the social institution of the ruler-cult, it functioned to direct attention to the present power and innate vitality of the emperor by positing an ultimate consummation as the due outcome of so worthy a life. The term itself communicated as much. Beginning with the prefix *ἀπο* (apo) meaning ‘from’ or ‘away from’, *Ἀποθέωσις* (apotheosis) acquired the connotation of a liberation of the ruler’s divine element from his mortal life on earth.<sup>88</sup> If, as Momigliano states, ‘people were finding it easy to call exceptionally powerful men gods because they were losing faith...in the effectiveness of their traditional gods’;<sup>89</sup> then it may not be surprising that Christians, seeing these same powerful men humbled by the zeal of Christian martyrs, came to adapt *apotheosis* in order for it to describe adequately the members of their own ranks. Perhaps by removing the prefix from the term, the very element that had come to suggest an escape from the shackles of mortality, the process of *θέωσις* (theosis) was firmly situated within the present instead of the future. Appropriated in this way, the notion of theosis implicitly subverted social conventions, including the specific virtues of the imperial cult as well as the more deeply ingrained tradition of heroic death in general. For insiders, however, the desire to comprehend death at the hands of one’s opponents was palpable. Alongside the societal and doctrinal tensions existed the physical dimension of the conflict: death, or Berger’s ‘marginal situation *par excellence*’.<sup>90</sup>

### Personal Heresy

The topics of identity and social cohesion are always intimately connected. In the second century, as we have shown, Roman identity and social unity was dependant on religious complicity from those within the boundaries of the empire. When residents such as Christians displayed recalcitrance and an ostensible disregard for rituals and traditions, the natural response from pagans was aggressive and primal. Here we recall Lorenz’s work on animal aggression and its function for establishing ‘pecking orders’ and the manner by which Mol appropriated that observation for the study of religious identity. For the Romans, civil religion and its immutable link to

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<sup>88</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889).

<sup>89</sup> Momigliano, 95.

<sup>90</sup> Berger, *The Social Reality*, 32.

the imperial cult fostered an identity and cultivated a stability encapsulated in the notions of *pax romana* and *pax deorum*. What is more, Sherwin-White argues convincingly that the second century witnessed an increase in Roman unity:

As the governing class came to be recruited increasingly from outside of Italy the distinction between Roman citizens, subjects and foreigners became blurred politically...The peoples of the empire came to be regarded as 'our people', *cives* or *hominess nostri*. This attitude led finally to the amalgamation of all subjects as Roman citizens under the *constitution Antoniniana*.<sup>91</sup>

It was precisely this waxing sense of solidarity that the Christians threatened; just as any social unit would, the Romans sought to conserve the identity they held to be sacred even as it became more inclusive.

However, our overarching concern is with the sacralising and resolving actions of the second-century Christians; a subject we partially breach by peering into the physical form of antagonism they experienced. For these religious adherents (that is, Christians), too, identity was constructed in the face of opposition and preserved with vehemence. As they came to face persecution, Christian identity and group cohesion became embroiled in a paradigm indebted to the harsh experiences themselves. As Judith Perkins asserts, Christians used the discourse of tortured bodies as a means for articulating their social identity.<sup>92</sup> The marginalisation they felt physically was also internalised and felt inwardly, manifesting itself as a meaningful identity. Just as *communitas* develops for those in a liminal state, so the Christians began to enjoy increased solidarity as (in our terms) the reception of persecution became the recognition of martyrdom.

As one might expect, there is considerable overlap between the societal/doctrinal heresies already discussed and the personal heresies to follow. Justin, for example, concurrently laments both the curses of the Jews towards the

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<sup>91</sup> Sherwin-White, 26-7.

<sup>92</sup> Judith Perkins, 'Space, Place, Voice in the Acts of the Martyrs,' *Mimesis and Intertextuality*, ed. Dennis MacDonald (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 123-4. See also, Moss, 108: 'If in the world of the text [of *Letter of the Churches of Vienna and Lyons*] the martyr's body is the site for cosmic battle, in Greek and Roman cross-examinations the body of the tortured subject (a slave) is a locus for truth. According to this system the slave cannot resist the truth-extracting structures of torture. The artifice of human interaction is destroyed by torture: the slave cannot help but give truthful witness in this state. The inextricability of torture and truth meant that the slave body was open to excavation and could be mined for truth.'

Christians and the former's violence against the same group.<sup>93</sup> Tertullian responds to the exchange between Pliny and Trajan with incensed incredulity, underlining the curious decision to persecute the accused even when their beliefs are as innocuous as their crimes are elusive.<sup>94</sup> In the *Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons* (hereafter, *Letter*), a martyrdom account to which we turn our attention below, those persecuting the Christians in Gaul decide to burn their victims and discard the ashes into the Rhône so that there is no hope of resurrection. This belief in resurrection is then cited as the motivating force behind the 'new foreign cult' in which torture is accepted willingly, thus rendering the latter ineffective.<sup>95</sup> The physical persecution, then, took a particular form in conversation with the doctrines and social conventions of each party.

As for martyrologies like the *Letter*, one primary objective was the reinforcement of group solidarity;<sup>96</sup> therefore, it is not surprising to encounter within their pages an abundance of rhetorical turns. Nevertheless, most of these texts are considered historically reliable in their articulation of the nature of Christian suffering.<sup>97</sup> With this in mind, the present exploration of the second century proceeds with an analysis of two martyrdom accounts, both linked to Irenaeus, albeit in two different ways. First, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is discussed as a record of martyrdom in the second century.<sup>98</sup> Then, we return to the *Letter*, a composition supposedly generated in Gaul during the latter half of this period.

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<sup>93</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 16.

<sup>94</sup> Tertullian, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Eusebius, V.1.63. The letter is preserved only in chapter five of Eusebius' *History of the Church*. For a recent English translation, we use the same version of Eusebius cited previously. Due to its ease of use, however, discussions of this martyrology also benefit from reference to: E.C.E. Owen, *Some Authentic Acts of the Early Martyrs* (London: S.P.C.K., 1933), 53-70.

<sup>96</sup> Perkins, 134.

<sup>97</sup> Moss, 100-06. Moss provides an overview of the scepticism surrounding the reliability of the letter. She is not quite willing to deny it its place among the other martyrologies, but speaks with a cautious tone about how much of the letter is Eusebius and how much is his source, knowledge that she rightfully suggests cannot be obtained with any certainty. For the position that the letter is completely unreliable, see James Westfall Thompson, 'The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177,' *The American Journal of Theology* 16.3(1912): 359-84.

<sup>98</sup> Candida R. Moss, 'On the Dating of Polycarp: Rethinking the Place of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* in the History of Christianity,' *Early Christianity* 1(2010): 572, 574. Moss' article is the most recent and exhaustive discussion of the problems with dating the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. She notes that the extant version of the text most likely dates from the first half of the third century instead of the middle of the second century as was previously thought. Even so, she believes that it is 'probable' that the

### *Martyrdom of Polycarp*

Michael Holmes recognises the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* as ‘the oldest written account of a Christian martyrdom outside the New Testament.’<sup>99</sup> Along with the aforementioned epistle from Christians in Lyons and Vienne, it may also serve as proof of a sort of martyrological genre in which the persecutions are detailed in the form of a general letter from a church or churches to another church or churches. The retelling of Polycarp’s martyrdom is attributed to the church at Smyrna, where Polycarp was bishop, and is addressed to the church at Philomelium.

It would be difficult to gainsay the account’s significance. As Holmes and W.H.C. Frend both attest, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* testifies to the growing unrest and intensifying maltreatment of Christians in Asia during the middle of the second century.<sup>100</sup> Some scholars believe that the letter was written sometime between 155 C.E. and 160 C.E., thus documenting a martyrdom that occurred before the reign of Marcus Aurelius (whose reign lasted 161 – 180).<sup>101</sup> In that case, the persecution would not correspond with other accounts and might exist as a random, anomalous outburst in which a Christian bishop was tried and killed in Smyrna along with eleven others during the same period thought to be so peaceful that it caused bishop Melito of Sardis to forget that persecution had ever happened.<sup>102</sup> If, however, the letter dates from around 167 C.E., the date Eusebius provides for Polycarp’s death; then it stands alongside other evidence for increased hostilities during the reign of Aurelius, a period during which Irenaeus was ascending the ranks of ecclesial leadership. Frend accepts this later dating, and it is made all the more plausible if chapters twenty-one and twenty-two are later extensions, a very likely possibility given the conclusion of chapter twenty and the manner in which the those two questionable chapters explicitly

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author of the extant version had an earlier, second-century document as a source. For this reason, we resist calling it a second-century text, but still believe it is useful in reconstructing the persecution of that time.

<sup>99</sup> Holmes, 131.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.; W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 268-70.

<sup>101</sup> For this dating, see Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 86-7; and T.D. Barnes, ‘A Note on Polycarp,’ *Journal of Theological Studies* 18(1967): 433-37.

<sup>102</sup> Eusebius, IV.15.6



and unashamedly build on one another as if successive editors were keen to show that they were adding further elaboration.<sup>103</sup>

It seems possible that Eusebius' date is close to the original material used to compose the letter.<sup>104</sup> As Frend notes, other outbreaks of persecution occurred during this same period in Asia.<sup>105</sup> There are other reasons that the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is very significant for the present summation of the personal heresy faced by Irenaeus and his Christian peers. Not only is its narration of the martyrdom thought to relay relatively accurate minutiae concerning the types of death experienced by the persecuted, but its original version may have been written based on the eyewitness account of Irenaeus.<sup>106</sup> If this is true, and if it is defensible to hold that Irenaeus also composed part or all of that first version of the *Letter* from Lyons, then one begins to see both the reason for our selection of Irenaeus as well as the possible motive behind his construction of a soteriology meant to resolve existential conflict. Having come from Asia Minor to Gaul, Irenaeus may have personally witnessed multiple instances of heinous persecutions and composed his theological works shortly thereafter (between 180 C.E. and 190 C.E.).

The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* presents the reader with a poignant narrative of the socially incendiary nature of a stalwart's conviction and the method by which that bishop and others were killed. It opens with a description of the persecutions already endured. Christians, the text claims, have been lashed with whips to the point of exposing veins and arteries; they have faced wild animals and sundry forms of torture including lying on beds of broken shells.<sup>107</sup> As for Polycarp, he is repeatedly asked to swear allegiance to Caesar. Unfailingly, the bishop refuses to renounce his Christian faith. The proconsul first threatens Polycarp with death at the paws of beasts, but this does little to sway the Christian leader.<sup>108</sup> In the end, Polycarp is burned and stabbed. His death is said to be one of twelve that took place.

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<sup>103</sup> Frend, 268.

<sup>104</sup> See note 98 above.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>106</sup> 'Martyrdom of Polycarp,' 22.2. The details of the martyrdom are said to have been based on the papers of Irenaeus transcribed by an individual called Gaius.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.2, 2.4

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.1

From such an account, it is learned that the *modus operandi* of the persecutors was very often death by wild animals in the arena. Apparently, when fire was preferred, the victim was typically nailed to a fixed structure so that he or she could not escape the fatal flames. It is also apparent that the authors of the martyrology believed Jews to be equally as culpable as pagans and that; ultimately, it was the devil who instigated it all.<sup>109</sup> This is yet another example of the exogenous nature of heresy and an ostensible case of physical harm at the hands of both Jews and pagans:

Evarestus was writing under the stress of crisis. He had no time for theological niceties. He wanted to tell the Christians of Philomelium and the world how the great Polycarp had been arrested, tried and gone serenely to his end. His was the model martyrdom, victim like his Lord had been, of the unholy alliance of pagans and Jews.<sup>110</sup>

This was no isolated incident, either. Although persecution remained sporadic and localised until the third century, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* simply relates one of at least two notable eruptions during Irenaeus' time. The other, transpiring around 176 C.E. to 178 C.E., included the deaths of three believers in Eumeneia one of whom was their bishop Thraseas.<sup>111</sup> More importantly, a gruesome outbreak took place in Lyons, the Gallic city in which Irenaeus would become bishop. The letter documenting that event reveals a great deal about the form of opposition faced and indicates the embryonic stages of the resolution process for those insiders touched by the affair.

#### *Martyrs at Vienne and Lyons*

There is some opacity in the scholarly understanding of how Christianity found its way to Gaul during the second century, not to mention a sizable and justifiable degree of scepticism concerning the plausibility of a joint martyrological epistle originating from both Lyons and their rival city, Vienne.<sup>112</sup> It is likely that the various towns of Gaul were partially settled by immigrants from Asia Minor who had followed the Rhône Valley as a trade route, immigrants who brought their Christian beliefs and practices with them to their new homes. The seeds of persecution may

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<sup>109</sup> For Jewish involvement, see 12.2, 13.1, 17.2, and 18.1; For the devil, see 2.4 and 17.1

<sup>110</sup> Frend, 288.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>112</sup> Moss, 100-06. Moss offer a concise but beneficial discussion of these issues.

have been planted by tensions created between the locals and the influx of these foreign ideas, and the hostility was nourished ‘by the occurrence of natural disasters, such as the vicious onset of disease or famine: thus the persecutions along the Rhône may have been precipitated by the waves of contagious disease which spread throughout the Empire from 165 onwards.’<sup>113</sup> Such catastrophes, as has been discussed, were often blamed on the pernicious qualities of superstitions. Perhaps more notable is the ubiquity of religious conflict ensuing because of a perceived infiltration of established norms by external forces. This is also a phenomenon observed among the early Mormons as they were repeatedly expelled from various towns and states, and it is another way of articulating our understanding of heresy in general.

In any case, the tension in Lyons and Vienne seems to have erupted into outright brutality and bloodshed. Although the letter is the only record of the events it relays from this time period, it is still possible to excavate cautiously the details of its narrative in order to learn a bit about the violence experienced. As Boudewijn Dehandschutter highlights, the *Letter* can be read on three levels: story, epistle, part of Eusebius.<sup>114</sup> The analysis by Candida Moss, already cited, is explicitly a literary look at the narrative and certainly exemplifies the viability of such an exposition of the text. The *Letter* differs from other martyr acts, such as that of the Scillitan martyrs of Africa which is contemporaneous with the Gallic letter, in that the former appears not to be based on actual legal proceedings. In spite of the rhetorical embellishments and hyper-spiritual tone of the work, a number of useful specifics shine through with regards to the personal heresies carried out against the Christians.

As Eusebius himself states in his introduction to the letter, its contents provide both the historical record and the lessons to be learned from it. One of the most notable messages of the letter concerns the demographics of the Christian community; the specific characters in the narrative include men, women, slaves, youths, the aged, and a doctor. A number of the martyrs were Roman citizens as well, including one

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<sup>113</sup> Ludlow, 26.

<sup>114</sup> Boudewijn Dehandschutter, ‘A Community of Martyrs: Religious Identity and the Case of the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne,’ *More than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity*, ed. Johan Leemans (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 3.

Attalus.<sup>115</sup> These Roman Christians were beheaded instead of facing the beasts of the amphitheatre. The latter punishment was repeatedly used against those who refused to denounce their membership in the young movement by making offerings to other gods. The wild animals were only a small portion of the cruelty, however. The martyrs were beaten, stoned, dragged across the ground, whipped, forced to endure the pain of hot metal plates placed on sensitive areas of their bodies, imprisoned, and put to death by the white-hot torment of the 'iron chair'. If the *Letter* is reliable, the number of those martyred continually increased due to incessant arrests being made in the two cities.<sup>116</sup> Finally, the various martyrs succumbed to the torture, and their bodies were left in the sun for six days before being burned; the ashes were dumped into the Rhône so that the Christian remnant could not pay due homage to their fallen friends nor claim any resurrection of the dead.<sup>117</sup>

To these historical events are added editorial flourishes. For instance, there is a constant theme of 'painless suffering' in the text, a theological claim that one's witness engenders analgesic power. In turn, this power neutralises the persecution. Supernatural claims in the text do hint at the Christian community's eagerness to make meaning out of their experiences. The letter ends with a statement commending Irenaeus as a worthy presbyter in the church, presumably meant to bolster his authority in the eyes of the Asian recipients of the letter. Whether or not Irenaeus composed this record himself, Eusebius unequivocally connects the church leader with the churches in Gaul, and Irenaeus does become the bishop of Lyons shortly after these alleged persecutions. Moss argues for a Gallic form of Christianity responsible for the similarities between Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* and the theological content of the *Letter*.<sup>118</sup> In either case, the Christians of this region and this time demonstrate the recurrent phenomenon of interpreting opposition in terms of an ideal, external enemy before postulating means of redress.

Throughout the *Letter*, the travails of the in-group are formulated as stemming from the ultimate exogenous force – at various times: the Devil, the adversary, the

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<sup>115</sup> Eusebius, V.1.44

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., V.1.13

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., V.1.62. This is reminiscent of Polycarp's martyrdom; his body was also burned as a mockery of the Christian claim that bodies could be resurrected.

<sup>118</sup> Moss, 120.

crooked serpent, the beast, and Satan.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps more illuminating, the text of the *Letter* contains a focus on Stephen (from Acts 7) as a proto-martyr, an effort to interpret the present in the light of the past also employed by Irenaeus but absent from many other texts of the second century.<sup>120</sup> Both the emphasis on Satan and the mention of Stephen point to a very significant element in these second-century works: ‘martyrdom was the peak of moral excellence.’<sup>121</sup> To follow Stephen was to follow Christ was to participate in the disarming victory over the enemy. Personal heresy was personified in the form of Satan, and the willingness to suffer was the volitional act *par excellence*.

Dehandschutter rightly avers that the *Letter* is not an example of voluntary martyrdom but is focused on the ‘worthiness’ of those martyred.<sup>122</sup> The figures whose stories are told in the *Letter* do not seek out their own deaths. They were accepting, however; and the issues of acceptance and worthiness appear inseparable. The merit of the characters is manifest in their passive courage. Individuals such as Vettius Epagathus were compelled by their righteousness to affirm their standing as a Christian, an affirmation that they knew would secure a position in ‘the ranks of the martyrs’.<sup>123</sup> The text, unquestionably, does portray the persecutions in Gaul as a sort of athletic contest between the in-group and the out-group; thus, it differs from the eager desire to die present in other records because those in Gaul exhibited great mettle and strength, convincing their peers who had denied Christ to return even if it meant sure death.<sup>124</sup>

Even so, the author of the *Letter* (Irenaeus or not) joins with Irenaeus in proposing a tripartite arrangement interlinking the past righteousness, the present suffering, and the future salvation of the individual. Indeed, one martyr who was tied to a stake is likened to Christ on the cross, seeing their fellow believer suffer in this way reminded the others present that ‘any man who has suffered for the glory of

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<sup>119</sup> Eusebius, V.1.5, V.1.14, V.1.16, V.1.25, V.1.27, V.1.42, V.1.57, V.2.6

<sup>120</sup> *AH*, III.12.10; Moss, 117.

<sup>121</sup> Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 241.

<sup>122</sup> Dehandschutter, 19.

<sup>123</sup> Eusebius, V.1.10

<sup>124</sup> See, Ignatius’ ‘Letter to the Romans,’ *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 103; Irenaeus, *AH*, V.28.4

Christ has fellowship for ever with the living God.<sup>125</sup> Such fellowship was salvation and relates to the *participatio* and *communio* frequently mentioned by Irenaeus. For the latter, communion or fellowship with God was the unique hope of humanity. The mingling of humanity with divinity was prefigured, thus restored as a possibility, in Jesus Christ.<sup>126</sup> More importantly, the intensely physical persecutions essentially inspired this notion of *theosis* as a sort of embodied glory wherein the corporeality of the believer's body was integral to the system of advancement. Appropriating, as we have shown, the notion of *apotheosis* and interpreting their predicament in the light of Jesus who was understood to have been crucified unjustly, the second-century Christians connected somatic actions with salvation. The martyr was one who had lived worthily; death at the hands of heretics (in our social sense) only immortalised the victim, figuratively and literally. The Romans contributed this interpretive system themselves: 'For the Romans, as for the early Christians, the victim was conspicuously central and active: the more actively voluntary, the more effective the sacrifice. Sacrifice exalted the victim and rendered him or her divine.'<sup>127</sup> This 'active voluntarism' flowed from the degree of righteousness and affected the Christian understanding of martyrdom itself as a 'fulfilment'. Writing before the composition of the *Letter*, Justin already described conversion to Christianity as becoming perfect (τέλειος). By the late second century, the *Letter* used a form of the word τέλειος ('perfect(ed)') when describing those who finally succumbed to the persecutions.<sup>128</sup> In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus employed the same term when promulgating his theological anthropology in which disciples of Christ who follow the Scriptures as explicated by the Church are made 'perfect'.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Eusebius, V.1.41; Dehandschutter, 18.

<sup>126</sup> *AH*, IV.20.4

<sup>127</sup> Carlin Barton, 'Honor and Sacredness in the Roman and Christian Worlds,' *Sacrificing the Self*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 30.

<sup>128</sup> Eusebius, V.2.2, V.2.5, V.3.3

<sup>129</sup> *AH*, IV.26.1

## Christianos Esse Non Licet

The Christians of the second century were ultimately condemned because they possessed an identity: Christian.<sup>130</sup> It was this name that incited fear and reflexive aggression due to its supposed crimes but, perhaps more to the point, due to its potential to expose what Bourdieu and Arnal refer to as the *doxa* of society. Yet, as the Christians endured various attacks to their physical wellbeing and social status, they came to recognise the oppressive heresy. That they immediately sought to incorporate the opposition into a meaning system can be seen from their budding concepts of salvation that presaged more complex soteriological schemas in which deification took centre stage. By the end of the second century, Christian leaders embraced the present as the vital epoch in salvation history:

...theologians adapted themselves surprisingly easily to the ‘time of the church,’ which provided the present – the existence under Christ’s invisible rule – with meaning and let the future grow pale. Toward the end of the second century, Christians could already *pray for the delay* of the final fulfilment. (original emphasis)<sup>131</sup>

Origen concurs, seeing the *parousia* as ‘the coming of Christ in perfected men and women.’<sup>132</sup>

In accordance with this reverence for the present, the persecuted Christians slowly altered their thoughts on the origin of the opposition itself. Justin blamed human free will and the nefarious workings of demons for the misfortunes of believers.<sup>133</sup> Only a few decades later, however, these agonistic forces were taken to be divinely-sanctioned opportunities to progress. Thus, the empire was a mechanism of providence.<sup>134</sup> Much as early Mormons viewed the United States and its Constitution as integral to God’s plans for the world, so the Christians of Irenaeus’ day came to welcome opposition as a supernatural wedge dividing the righteous from the unrighteous. We explore this interpretive framework more fully in the following chapter but here we acknowledge the changing perspectives as reception and

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<sup>130</sup> Ste. Croix, ‘Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?’; Dehandschutter, 14-5; Justin, *The First Apology*, 4 & *The Second Apology*, 2; Tertullian, 2.18

<sup>131</sup> Räisänen, 111. Räisänen is referring to Tertullian, 39.2

<sup>132</sup> Räisänen, 110.

<sup>133</sup> Justin, *The First Apology*, 14 & *The Second Apology*, 5.

<sup>134</sup> Bowersock, 55; Momigliano, 136.

recognition overflow into a desire for resolution; a process that permitted Tertullian to avow, ‘the blood of Christians is seed’ as he wrote with boldness against a society that had repeatedly tried to outlaw his community.<sup>135</sup>

The very same sentiment was echoed many years later and many miles away when a leading Mormon intellectual reflected on the place of conflict in his tradition’s past:

Opposition to the Church, the pitiless maltreatment to which its people have been subjected, particularly in the earlier decades of its history, comprising mobbings, drivings, spoliation, scourgings, and assassination, have operated to strengthen the Church, body and soul. True, the heat of persecution has scorched and withered a few of the sickly plants, such as had little depth of sincerity; but the general effect has been to promote a fuller growth, and to make richer and more fertile the Garden of the Lord.<sup>136</sup>

With this outlook in mind our exposition now sets its sights on those early Mormons of nineteenth-century America and their struggle with various forms of heresy. Remaining sensitive to the contextual details separating early Christians and early Mormons, we nevertheless find it heuristically valuable to spotlight the latter as another historical moment in which social tension enveloped a nascent religious movement. In the pages below, therefore, the characteristics of anti-Mormonism in the early nineteenth century are traced with the same care and critical awareness with which we explored Christian persecution in the days of Irenaeus. Again, we employ the three-fold model of social heresy. This methodological consistency serves the topic well by delicately handling the inevitably comparative nature of our study, simultaneously drawing to the surface the similar oppositional forces faced by the two parties as well as flagging key areas of interest for sustained analysis in the next chapter.

### **Ministers, Mobs, Apostates, and ‘Gentile’ (Protestant) America: The Early Mormon Example**

In attempting to scour the early Mormon example for its unique insights, one immediately observes numerous tensions and paradoxes. At every level (LDS, North Eastern America, America), conflict and reform appear to be the defining marks. The

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<sup>135</sup> Tertullian, 50.13

<sup>136</sup> James Talmage, *The Vitality of Mormonism: Brief Essays on Distinctive Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1919), 15.



‘pitiless maltreatment’ mentioned by James Talmage above provides a suitable example of one hurdle, viz. that of perspective. As was mentioned in the preceding chapter, persecution almost necessitates interpretation by those on the receiving (often, minority) side of the clash. Incongruity is quite likely to exist between the imagined persecution cited by insiders and the events presented by the historical record. That being so, the student of religion must recognise the uncertainty involved in reconstructions of social struggles. Moore, in his study of ‘the Mormon controversy’, offers a similarly cautious aside:

In struggling for position, the opposing parties relied on a variety of strategies. One was violence. Another was legislation and its subversion. Yet another was rhetoric that made contradictory and competing claims. Once historians recognise that they are trying to unravel not merely what was true in some easily defined objective sense, but what people thought was true, or what they wanted others to accept as true, they have to come to grips with the fact that a lot of seemingly contrary things were simultaneously true. Perception admits, even insists on, that sort of ambiguity.<sup>137</sup>

Moore’s words are incisive. He not only points to one of the unavoidable dilemmas involved in the study of Mormon conflict, but also helpfully highlights the various ‘strategies’ employed by the opposed communities. The latter observation is important because it reasserts our own focus on the societal, doctrinal, and personal forms of heresy.

Before turning to those topics, however, it is important to continue to divulge the tensions present in early Mormon history. Throughout the following pages, it is assumed that the insider’s account of LDS persecution will differ by some degree from that of the outsider or of later historians. Scholars themselves are far from agreement on the issue of Mormon persecution, as was demonstrated earlier in our discussion of the contradictory conclusions of Moore and Givens. The waters remain just as murky when historians consider specific events. Stephen LeSueur, for example, states definitively that the critical 1838 Mormon ‘war’ in Missouri was initiated by non-Mormons.<sup>138</sup> He is compelled to argue that ‘Joseph Smith exaggerated little when he complained that the law “is always administered against us and never in our favour.”’ Aware of the debate, LeSueur continues: ‘In Missouri,

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<sup>137</sup> Moore, 27.

<sup>138</sup> Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 252.

regardless of who was at fault or who broke the law, it was Mormon leaders who were jailed, and Mormons who were forced to abandon their homes.<sup>139</sup> These same Mormons encountered intense opposition in their next home state, Illinois. Historians John Hallwas and Roger Launius present the Illinois conflict in a starkly different fashion from LeSueur's description of the Missouri War: 'the only documented case of out-and-out religious persecution enacted in Hancock County [IL.]... [was] against the dissenters who dared to point out Mormon shortcomings in their newspaper and demand reform.'<sup>140</sup> In other words, Mormons inflicted persecution on those within their own ranks who showed mettle by publicly questioning the direction and behaviour of the group's leadership. For Hallwas and Launius, the Mormons of Illinois had become a 'theocratic, expansive, separatist community that would have provoked opposition anywhere in America...'<sup>141</sup>

Was that opposition – real or imagined, from within or without – truly *religious* in nature? This seemingly innocuous question captures the spirit of another rift in the field, viz., that some, but not all, early Mormons believed they were persecuted for their beliefs. Some, but not all, of their opponents agreed. Later, in our introduction of the doctrinal heresy faced by the early LDS community, we excavate this tension between those who choose to see Mormonism as a religious threat worthy of religious rebuke and others convinced that religion was, at best, a facade hiding the political and economic flavour of America's resistance to Joseph Smith and his followers.

The paradoxes and bifurcations continue as one's field of vision broadens. The America of the nineteenth century was still reckoning with the effects of independence and revolution just one generation earlier. An old guard of Calvinistic, puritan elites was losing influence in the face of rising democratic sentiments among the 'common man' of the rapidly growing western borders and the waxing sway of Enlightenment rationality. The country was not teetering on the edge of survival but wrestling with its unprecedented success and growth. Its sails were swollen without anyone at the helm. As the nation entered what is often called the era of Jacksonian

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>140</sup> John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, eds., *Cultures in Conflict* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 8.

America, republicanism and democracy seeped into the most unexpected of minds as the truest of values and the most potent of processes.<sup>142</sup> The upshot was a largely Protestant country whose inherited esteem for the individual was fertilised by a political and cultural environment that placed all power in the hands of the people, even when those citizens disagreed.

Opposition and conflict were inescapable. In a sense, they were the unfortunate by-products of the very characteristics that propelled the new republic. In the following examination of Mormon conflict, there is an intentional effort to avoid sides on many of these potentially polarising historical issues. Just as LeSueur observes, it is clear that the early followers of Joseph Smith endured true injustice and violent resistance at times. This may only account for a portion of the persecution many of these early Mormons recorded, the remainder constructed by their own emotional reflexes and rhetorical agendas.<sup>143</sup> Even so, the context was ripe for social discord, and the Mormons and their unbelieving neighbours often indulged in what was nearly a national pastime.

From the outset, Joseph Smith seems to have placed an emphasis on what we might now describe as binary opposites in the human experience and the propitious effects (both spiritual and material) of one force being countered by another. In the first edition of the Book of Mormon published in 1830, Smith recorded: 'Wherefore, the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement; for it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.'<sup>144</sup> Placing the law of God in opposition to happiness in the light of Christ's atonement, this passage seems to portend the more developed theology Smith would introduce years later. The passage also ascribed an authoritative tone to the notion that adversity is advantageous.

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<sup>142</sup> Throughout the following chapter, we employ 'Jacksonian' as a way to identify the era loosely capped by the War of 1812 on the one end and the American Civil War on the other, a period of unprecedented emphasis on the power of common citizens and the delimiting of the power of social elites.

<sup>143</sup> Ludlow, 49. Ludlow notes that the latter, of course, was also present in the early Church. Whether or not it was true, Christians 'felt they were a persecuted minority'.

<sup>144</sup> BOM1830, 2 Nephi 1

It is striking that Smith's reflections exhibit an increasing preoccupation with persecution and opposition. The theophanic event that would come to be known by Mormons as the First Vision, a moment of reported intensity and inspiration for Smith which we first mentioned in Chapter One, is a telling example. Smith described the details of this supernatural vision multiple times in the first decade of Latter-day Saint history. The version of the event that was canonised and reproduced in the sacred texts of Mormonism and that, as Douglas Davies notes, came to be a 'paradigmatic scene' for Latter-day Saints; was not recorded until 1839.<sup>145</sup> Yet, Smith provided details of the 1820 experience at least three times before.<sup>146</sup> Whereas the earlier accounts from around 1831/32 and 1835 speak of seeing a single being and 'two personages' with angels, respectively; the 1839 account specifically names the Father and Son appearing to young Joseph and recalls the way in which their arrival rescued Smith from an oppressive darkness that nearly destroyed him.<sup>147</sup> More importantly, the canonised version of this pivotal experience includes Smith's depiction of the personal persecution that followed the event. Our concern is not whether Smith's altered narrative was the result of fraudulent motives or fuller disclosure. Indeed, debating the historical validity of the later report does little to advance the present study. It is much more significant that, even if the persecutions and oppressive supernatural powers were simply omitted in the earliest depictions, they eventually received emphasis at a time when the Mormons were still recovering from violent conflict with Missourians and subsequent expulsion from the state. Much like the basic elements of deification that gradually rose to the surface during Smith's tenure as leader, focus on persecution and endurance sharpened over time. The words from 2 Nephi lodged a seed in the early LDS psyche, and this sprouted fresh green leaves after being germinated by political and religious unrest in nineteenth-century America.

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<sup>145</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 15, 53; Rodney Needham, *Circumstantial Deliveries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 89; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), 50, 51. Davies borrows the concept of 'paradigmatic scenes' from Needham and incorporates the 'type-scene' used by Alter to explore narrative patterns in the Bible in order to discuss central symbolic structures operative within Mormon theology and culture. In this instance, Smith's First Vision is understood as one mechanism for relating both to Jesus Christ's transfiguration and the everyday experiences of mortal life.

<sup>146</sup> Dean C. Jessee, 'The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision,' *BYU Studies* 9.3(1969): 278-86.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

## Nineteenth-Century America

The nineteenth century was a unique period for America, in which tradition, authority, and establishment of any kind were challenged in the names of democracy, revolution, republicanism, and God. Politics and religion were melded together indissolubly. One of the central figures of this time, Alexander Campbell, began a new Christian sect called the Disciples of Christ and remarked that 4 July 1776 should be remembered much the same way as the Jewish Passover, as a signpost of freedom.<sup>148</sup> Political and social liberty was synonymous with religious liberty. Such a notion was only partially inherited from the Revolution with its disdain for popery and monarchy. The new sentiments of the nineteenth century stemmed from an open embrace of democratic principles and an application of such values to other facets of life. Much like the growing chasm separating the older ideas of Jeffersonian politics and the fresh conceptions of Jacksonians, the hegemony of white Protestants grew increasingly divided between the traditional, educated denominations and the rapidly expanding constituency of semi-literate, sons of democracy. In effect, America was facing an epistemological crisis. In the midst of securing national independence, the primacy of erudite clergy and formal theology within the Christian churches was challenged but ultimately buttressed by Enlightenment inroads; now, these mainstays of religion were threatened by the very laity they were meant to serve.

Believing that everyone should be capable of discerning truth just as everyone is trusted to elect national leaders, America's citizens unwittingly embarked on the process of constructing a form of civil religion. As founts of knowledge, clergy were supplanted by less-formal, grassroots media such as newspapers and pamphlets.<sup>149</sup> Once again, the printing press took centre stage in a religious revolution. The Second Great Awakening, as this seminal episode of religious reform is called, almost begs for comparison to the Protestant Reformation: 'Christendom has probably not witnessed a comparable period of religious upheaval since the Reformation – and never such an explosion of entrepreneurial energy.'<sup>150</sup> Placing the power of insight

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<sup>148</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 71.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. The nation's first religious newspaper, *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, was launched in 1808.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

and influence in the hands of the common citizen resulted in more than new, fragmented sects. It caused an eruption of religio-political activity that, in turn, engendered a sort of national religion. It was no contradiction to speak of Christian nationalism. In fact, Heman Humphry, the president of Amherst College, said in 1831 that America had finally achieved ‘that sort of union which makes every patriot a Christian and every Christian a patriot.’<sup>151</sup> The future was thought to be undeniably bright for the young nation, and its key purpose was conceptualised in religious terms: it was to be the city on a hill. The democratic, capitalist cornerstones of America were now the building blocks of Christian faith, extended outward for the entire world to see and emulate.

Focusing on a small, fledgling group such as the Mormons, however, highlights one of the most conspicuous ironies of the day. The same respect for individualism and contempt for intellectualism that helped crystallise the constitutive elements of America’s emerging civil religion also gave birth to a myriad of competing sects, some of which venerated socially subversive ideals that defied the dominant system. Thus, religious movements such as the Latter-day Saints owed much of their existence to the republicanism gripping New England but came to represent an alternative to those predominant standards. Adopting and echoing Marvin Hill’s basic but profound argument that Joseph Smith and the early Mormons intended the establishment of a unifying religious antithesis to the rampant pluralism of the period, Klaus Hansen contends that the millennial focus of nineteenth-century American Protestantism which led most Americans toward an overt optimism concerning their nation’s role in God’s will was framed differently by Smith and his community:

To Joseph, Mormonism was American to its very core, making it potentially subversive to those who saw such language as rhetoric that only masked a deep cultural divide. Mormonism presented itself not merely as another variant of American Protestant pluralism, but as an articulate and sophisticated counterideology [sic] that attempted to establish a ‘new heaven and a new earth’ intended as an alternative to the Protestant evangelical millennium.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 106.

<sup>152</sup> Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), introduction, xiv; Klaus J. Hansen, ‘Joseph Smith, American Culture, and the Origins of Mormonism,’ *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, eds. Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40.

In simple terms, the Mormons threatened the ascendant Protestant culture in America even whilst owing their existence to its relatively unprecedented level of pluralism.

Hill sees the early Mormons as displaying a degree of animosity not only toward religious pluralism but also towards the general social splintering of nineteenth-century America represented by the increasing popularity of volunteer groups, benevolent societies, and a plethora of other social institutions.<sup>153</sup> The sheer diversity and quantity of these organisations, however, almost guaranteed violent outbreaks between competing groups of all sorts, not just between Mormons and everyone else. Riots, mobs, and a relatively illusory faith in the merits of vigilantism were unfortunate features of American society at this time. As Michael Feldberg, author of an impressive volume on violence in Jacksonian America, says, ‘...the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s were probably marked by a higher frequency and variety of urban collective violence and disorder among private groups than was any equivalent period of time in the nation’s past.’<sup>154</sup> The 1830s and 1840s witnessed what perhaps was the apex of this ubiquitous aggression due to the establishment of the abolition movement and rapid immigrant growth (especially of Catholics). By 1837, it was all enough to compel Abraham Lincoln to state, in characteristically poignant phrasing,

...there is even now something of an ill omen amongst us. I mean the increasing disregard for law which pervades the country – the growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions in lieu of the sober judgment of the courts, and the worse than savage mobs for the executive ministers of justice. This disposition is awfully fearful in any community; and that it now exists in ours, though grating to our feelings to admit it, would be a violation of truth and insult to our intelligence to deny. Accounts of outrages committed by mobs form the every-day news of the times. They have pervaded the country from New England to Louisiana; they are neither peculiar to the eternal snows of the former nor the burning suns of the latter; they are not the creatures of climate, neither are they confined to the slaveholding or the non-slaveholding states. Alike they spring up among the pleasure-hunting master of Southern slaves, and the order-loving citizens of the land of steady habits. Whatever their causes be, it is common to the whole country.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Hill, introduction, xiv.

<sup>154</sup> Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot & Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5.

<sup>155</sup> T. Harry Williams, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: Selected Speeches, Messages and Letters* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1957), 7; quoted in Feldberg, 4-5.

Lincoln's speech failed to address one crucial detail, an aspect of Jacksonian America that the future president, Illinois legislator, and practising lawyer probably hoped was not true – namely, that at times those 'ministers of justice' were as embroiled in the national propensity for violence as anyone else. Writing from a jail in Illinois' neighbouring state of Missouri just over a year after Lincoln shared his thoughts on America's love affair with mob violence, one of Mormonism's key figures recounted how Judge John F. Ryland of Lexington, Missouri advised the Latter-day Saints to fight and kill the mob of angry Missourians who had run the Mormons out of the city of Independence.<sup>156</sup> If Parley Pratt's account is accurate, a local Judge recommended a tit-for-tat strategy. Mob violence was to be countered by more mob violence. It is tempting to conclude that a sort of corruption had overcome American society, or at least the justice system. Yet, it important to recognise that power was decentralised and wielded by the people, this was one of the objectives of American democracy. Again, the same foundation on which was built a thriving new nation proved hospitable to socially destabilising forces as well. Law enforcement and peace-keeping fell on the shoulders of under-resourced sheriffs and state militias. These bodies were hardly sufficient for checking the whims of what psychologists call groupthink,<sup>157</sup> and the lack of 'paramilitary, preventive police departments' meant that extralegal means were often used to realise the goals of the majority.<sup>158</sup> For the average citizen, however, this may have seemed entirely sufficient. LeSueur, for instance, notes that a publicist from the time considered 'Lynch law' to be a 'supplement' to the 'established laws of the country'.<sup>159</sup> Even so, the *Missouri Republican* printed an article in 1838 condemning vigilante activities against the

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<sup>156</sup> Parley P. Pratt, *History of the Late Persecution Inflicted by the State of Missouri Upon the Mormons* (Detroit: Dawson & Bates, 1839), 16.

<sup>157</sup> Irving Janis, 'Groupthink,' *Psychology Today* 5.6(1971): 43. Janis describes groupthink 'as a quick and easy way to refer to the mode of thinking that persons engage in when *concurrence-seeking* becomes so dominant in a cohesive ingroup that it tends to override realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action... the term refers to a deterioration in mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgments as a result of group pressures. (original emphasis)'

<sup>158</sup> Feldberg, 96-103; LeSueur, 254. Feldberg lists democratic ideology, predisposition to using violence for political goals, and rapid change (e.g., industrialization and immigration) alongside the absence of police as contributors to violence in Jacksonian America.

<sup>159</sup> LeSueur, 254. Incidentally, this publicist Francis Grund made this comment the same year that Lincoln lamented the use of violence across the nation.



Mormons.<sup>160</sup> Much like Hadrian's rescript concerning the proper legal handling of Christians, this was an effort to promote adherence to due process and diminish unjustified persecution. Just like the second-century emperor's charge, it accomplished neither. This outcome resulted from and reflected the unsettled state of the culture, one which revered the individual and the majority but was not yet uniformly striking a balance between the two. In the religious realm, this instability was often interpreted as unencumbered potential. Pluralism did not only extend to groups but to individuals; those of the latter category who possessed a creative mind and a charismatic bent were effectively unfettered by the new direction of American society, free to pursue their gifts and to gather a network of like-minded believers.<sup>161</sup> As historian Matthew Bowman rightly asserts, the 'peculiar democratic tide' washing over America,

...offered Americans the opportunity to master their own lives rather than subordinate themselves to the collective. It trained them in individualism, in self-reliance, in risk-taking, and in the pursuit of opportunity...The prophets were children of this age. Their grand religious experiments were possible only in the chaotic freedom of the time.<sup>162</sup>

#### *Religious Milieu: Awakenings and Liberties*

Charismatic prophets and sectarian movements, however, required fertile soil in which to take root. The religious milieu of nineteenth-century America was the ideal environment for such endeavours. Not unlike that of the second century, this religious context included a strong sense of the supernatural. Particularly among the less educated and those residing outside of the larger urban centres of the northeast, dreams and visions were often understood to possess spiritual meaning and provide revelatory guidance. As Alan Taylor notes, this was one component of 'Christian primitivism', a popular religious orientation identifiable by the individual's effort to 'directly know his God' through the use of spiritual media such as speaking in tongues, interpreting dreams, and witnessing miracles.<sup>163</sup> Christian primitivists were 'seekers' who displayed the eagerness for material and supernatural blending that

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>161</sup> Hansen, 36.

<sup>162</sup> Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People* (New York: Random House, 2012), 5.

<sup>163</sup> Alan Taylor, 'Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith's Treasure Seeking,' *Dialogue* 19.4(1986): 22-3.

Ernst Troeltsch attributed to mysticism.<sup>164</sup> Christian churches, these seekers claimed, were denying the spiritual power that was present in the earliest days of Christianity. Accordingly, they called for a return to a perceived original minimalism. Kicking open the doors to unmediated experiences with the divine, this growing body of religionists freshly reconstructed an almost medieval affinity for magic and supernaturalism.

Joseph Smith and his family serve as ideal examples. Bowman, drawing on the recollections of Joseph's own mother, elucidates the relationship between Joseph's father (Joseph Smith, Sr.) and religion in terms of the former's dissatisfaction with the available Christian denominations but vibrant intimacy with the spiritualism of dreams. Joseph Smith Sr. had many dreams, and these vivid experiences often contained religious allusions.<sup>165</sup> Likewise, his son participated in the folk magic of his day by using materials such as dowsing rods to locate hidden treasures underground. Much has been made of young Joseph's forays into the world of magic; some seeing the behaviour as indisputable evidence of Smith's nefarious ways and others downplaying its significance as a simple product of the times. The present acknowledgement of the Smith family's involvement in such practices functions only to illuminate the nineteenth-century interplay between democratic individualism, religious factionalism, and supernatural fervour.

Much as the pagans of the Graeco-Roman world tended to interpret natural disasters as divine displeasure, many American Christians in the early 1800s found divine intervention and spiritual communication in natural anomalies. Both Joseph Smith and Parley Pratt, for instance, witnessed the Leonid meteor storm of November 1833. Owing to another key characteristic of their religious context, millenarianism,

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<sup>164</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 377. Troeltsch notably claims that his mysticism type of religious expression also typically requires the use of print materials for the dispersion and consumption of knowledge. This is further support for the notion that the Christian primitivists of nineteenth-century America fit this description of mystics. For an extensive study of the religious environment that birthed Mormonism and the role of the religious seeker in the process, see Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 2-16. For the place of magic and the occult in early Mormonism, see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998) and John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On page one of Quinn's study, he also equates the form of Christian spirituality that was gaining popularity during the early years of the nineteenth century with 'mysticism', whereas Brooks sees Mormonism in particular as firmly fixed in the hermetic tradition which was still lingering after its heyday in the centuries preceding Mormonism's commencement.

<sup>165</sup> Bowman, 9.

each of these LDS figures interpreted the wondrous display in the night sky as a ‘sign’ of the impending return of Christ, the *eschaton*.<sup>166</sup> However, one paradox of this religious environment was its intensifying struggle between the worldview of the old Calvinists who imported their Scottish theological heritage whilst holding positions of leadership in churches as well as institutions of higher education and the new perspective of the rationalists who inherited a high regard for Enlightenment values.<sup>167</sup> The belief in divine sovereignty proffered by the Calvinists intersected with the generally optimistic anthropology of the rationalists, producing concepts such as America’s ‘manifest destiny’ within God’s plan for the world. At times, this intermingling of ostensibly incompatible philosophies also engendered confusion for the people. A popular jingle from nineteenth-century America demonstrates this reality:

You can and you can’t,  
 You shall and you shan’t;  
 You will and you won’t.  
 You’re damned if you do,  
 And damned if you don’t.<sup>168</sup>

This short verse expressed the obvious tension between Calvinism’s promulgation of a God whose will is arbitrary and unknowable and the Deist philosophy that claimed a rational God who rewards those who exhibit dedication and diligence. At best, the Protestant ethic was now amalgamated with the rapid growth and temporal success of the young republic. At worst, the newly empowered, and religiously inclined, individual citizens of the nation were disorientated and adrift in the rising waters of pluralism. For those convinced of the spiritual power available to the faithful, the challenge was to reconcile such notions with the now deeply planted demands of rationalism.<sup>169</sup> As for the early Mormons in particular, it is important to note that they

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<sup>166</sup> Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 14; Pratt, 23. Smith records this event in his personal diary entry for 13 November, the correct date of the massive meteor shower. Pratt mistakenly listed the occurrence as taking place on 7 November.

<sup>167</sup> McLoughlin, 99.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>169</sup> Benjamin E. Park, “‘Reasonings Sufficient’: Joseph Smith, Thomas Dick, and the Context(s) of Early Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38(2012): 212. Park, reshaping the historical understanding of Joseph Smith’s relationship to Thomas Dick’s *Philosophy of a Future State*, argues that the former ‘merely invoked’ the latter as one way of providing rational support for the budding

resolved this conflict, just as they attempted to resolve many others, by offering a relatively innovative system in which God was sovereign, spiritual gifts were practicable, and personal progress was both cosmologically ordained and understood in terms of expanding knowledge.<sup>170</sup>

This latter idea, that individuals can progress spiritually and intellectually, developed over the course of Smith's leadership. Indeed, the theological anthropology he came to espouse is the focus of our next chapter because there appears to be an affinity between new religious groups facing social heresy and the sort of soteriology that incorporates deification and individual development. Yet, one must recognise the indebtedness of Smith and others like him to the store of ideas made available in their respective cultures. Our primary argument is that persecution and other forms of religious opposition interact with the formation of salvation doctrines; nevertheless, it is undeniable that additional influences take part in the process, shaping the specific contours of the resulting doctrines. During the first half of the nineteenth century, a period often referred to as the Second Great Awakening, numerous strands of perfectionism could be found woven into the American religious fabric. The Transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the teachings of the Unitarian William Channing, the social experimentation of the Oneida community, and the revivals of Charles Finney all joined together in unexpected harmony to advocate similarly positive conceptions of human achievement in relation to spiritual enlightenment.<sup>171</sup> These disparate voices found inspiration and corroboration in Wesleyan theology and the perfectibility propagated by the newly formed Disciples of Christ.

Perfectionism was anticipated by the previously mentioned optimism concerning the nation. Each of the religious schools cited above shared this common source. However, the Mormons gradually diverged from the rest. Jordan Watkins says that 'lurking behind a fairly commonplace idea of perfectionism, anti-Mormons discovered one of Mormonism's most blasphemous teachings: the doctrine of equality

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belief system of Mormonism. This, Park argues, was the result of Smith's awareness that society now demanded reasonable foundations for religious doctrines.

<sup>170</sup> That both Irenaeus and Joseph Smith went to great lengths to harmonise and unify many matters is addressed and highlighted in the following chapter.

<sup>171</sup> Bowman, 79-80; McLoughlin, 128.

with Christ.’<sup>172</sup> In a similarly earnest tone, literary scholar Richard Brodhead speaks of the differences between Emerson and Smith as American prophets, peddling their versions of human and divine potential:

Smith put forth his prophetic authority as a real-world fact and demanded that real others accept it on those terms. Emerson, so to speak, mentalized the prophetic, taking it out of the realm of persons, places, and things and making it available as a fiction of self-empowerment...Smith insisted that he in his actual person was the bearer of the new dispensation, that his writings were divine revelations, that salvation was available through the exact forms, rites, and offices that he designated – and thousands of people accepted those claims...<sup>173</sup>

Just as the early Christians made special use of the pre-existing concept of *apotheosis*, so the early Mormons constructed their unique vision of deification by appropriating existing religious norms.

Brodhead’s statement also underscores the success of Smith’s prophetic efforts. This is due, in great part, to the religious context of both western New York and the American nation as a whole, a fitting setting for the birth of visionaries and new religious movements. Historian Whitney Cross first coined the term ‘The Burned-over District’ as a way to reference the geographical/historical region of religious revivalism in western New York between 1800 and 1850.<sup>174</sup> In his landmark study, Cross reveals that the heavy concentration of missionary activity, influx of migrant workers from the east, and establishment of ‘benevolent groups’ (i.e., missionary societies and tract societies) caused ‘a phenomenally intensive religious and moral awareness’ in the area of New York west of the Catskill and Adirondack mountains.<sup>175</sup> As evidence, Milton Backman intimates that ‘between 1816 and 1821, revivals were reported in more towns and a greater number of settlers joined churches than in any previous period of New York history...[yet] the grand climax in the “series

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<sup>172</sup> Jordan Watkins, “‘All of One Species’: Parley P. Pratt and the Dialectical Development of Early Mormon Conceptions of Theosis,’ *Parley P. Pratt and the Making of Mormonism*, eds. Gregory K. Armstrong, Matthew J. Grow, and Dennis J. Siler (Norman: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2011), 205.

<sup>173</sup> Richard H. Brodhead, ‘Prophets in America circa 1830: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nat Turner, Joseph Smith,’ *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, eds. Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>174</sup> Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 4.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

of crests in religious zeal” occurred between 1825 and 1837.’<sup>176</sup> As large numbers of itinerant farmers and labourers made the journey from locations such as eastern New York, Vermont, and Connecticut; the denominational hubs in cities like Boston and Philadelphia grew concerned over the spiritual and moral provisions available to these peripatetic populations. Some, such as the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, joined forces in sending missionaries to the western towns. By collaborating, these groups amassed a considerable religious force; however, it was the Baptists who overtook the Presbyterians in the Burned-over District by 1825 (with an estimated forty thousand members in that region alone).<sup>177</sup>

According to Cross, sects such as Freewill Baptists and Unitarian Baptists consisted of an abundance of believers who were ‘ready to respond to any spiritual stimulus but lack[ed] the initiative to originate or direct novelties.’<sup>178</sup> The latter activities were left to the devices of exceptionally prodigious religious leaders like Anne Lee (the Shakers), Alexander Campbell (Disciples of Christ), William Miller (Millerites/Adventists), and John Humphrey Noyes (Oneida Community). These individuals flourished in the rich revivalist soils of New England, finding the environment both conducive to religious experimentation and teeming with believers who preferred enthusiasm to intellect and needed to make sense of their economic struggles.<sup>179</sup> In this religious *mélange*, the Mormons ‘came to be seen as the most serious threat to the hegemony of the evangelicals.’<sup>180</sup> It is apparent that this animosity partially resulted from the speedy growth of Mormonism. When the movement first began in Palmyra, New York (within the boundaries of the Burned-over District) in 1830, there were approximately seventy to seventy-five members.<sup>181</sup> By Smith’s death in 1844, the Latter-day Saints numbered about fifteen thousand.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Milton V. Backman Jr., ‘Awakenings in the Burned-over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision,’ *BYU Studies* 9.3(1969): 301. Backman’s article is an impressive resource for further statistics related to the noteworthy religious fervour in this region.

<sup>177</sup> Cross, 24.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>180</sup> Hansen, 40.

<sup>181</sup> James B. Allen and Leonard J. Arrington, ‘Mormon Origins in New York: An Introductory Analysis,’ *BYU Studies* 9.3(1969): 268.

<sup>182</sup> Bowman, introduction, xv.

The mounting size of the Mormons was a direct threat to surrounding communities because the new religious group represented for many the regrettable apex of hyper-individualism, a cancerous despotism and ‘delusion’ enlivened by unbridled evangelicalism. Indeed, it took little time for early Mormonism to diverge appreciably even from its dynamic birthplace:

...the evangelistic-mindedness from which it developed in the beginning, and which constantly fed it with members, had little tolerance for such an unorthodox offspring, and drove the Saints by its persecution along their westering course. But neither the organisation of the church, nor its personnel, nor its doctrines were frontier products. All belonged rather to that Yankee, rural, emotionalised, and rapidly maturing culture which characterised western New York so markedly in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>183</sup>

Thus, as Smith and his followers left both their cultural heritage and their orthodox roots behind, they faced the expanding western frontier as outsiders. A product of democratic principles and the new American form of Protestantism, the Mormons encountered hostility and opposition from a society whose fog was lifting only to reveal what seemed a threateningly industrious and enigmatic faction within its borders.

### **Societal Heresy**

Just one year after Joseph Smith started his church, one of his most esteemed followers reported that ‘the whole country...with all the devils from the infernal pit are united, and foaming out their own shame against us.’<sup>184</sup> Whilst it is doubtful that such a small minority roused the entire nation, these words from Oliver Cowdery set the tone for the following analysis of the societal opposition faced and imagined by the earliest Mormons. At times, the American nation indeed seemed outraged by the presence of the Mormons. At other times, politicians at both the state and federal levels appeared indifferent. It is difficult to deny, however, that the Mormons experienced a great deal of resistance and outright hostility from their fellow citizens. J.H. Beadle’s 1877 observation that America’s one native religion ‘is the sole apparent exception to the American rule of universal toleration’ would be just as

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<sup>183</sup> Cross, 150.

<sup>184</sup> B.H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932), 1.15. Hereafter, this seven-volume history, often referred to as ‘Joseph Smith’s History’ will be abbreviated as HC.

profound if aimed at the period of Joseph Smith's leadership. Beadle speculated as to the reason for this unique rejection of Mormonism: '...Something peculiar to Mormonism takes it out of the sphere of religion and necessarily brings it into conflict with a republican people and their institutions.'<sup>185</sup> The remarks supported an editorial written by Beadle attacking the theocratic character of Mormonism in Utah, but his words are perhaps less rhetorically potent and more astute than even he realised.

Some scholars essentially view anti-Mormonism as a process of religious intolerance hiding behind a mask of political or ethnic prejudice.<sup>186</sup> From another perspective, however, social roles and markers are necessarily, and inimitably, linked with tension as individuals and groups struggle to reconcile their self-definitions with the identities accorded them by society. The outcome for the early Mormons, just as for the early Christians, was a confusion of religious, political, and economic conflict; it would be virtually impossible to isolate one of these areas as the root or core of the fracas. Critique of Mormonism came from many directions and, perhaps more often than not, arrived in an alloyed form. Thus, in 1842 the Presbyterian minister Jonathan Turner could refer to the LDS as 'in truth, the most dangerous and virulent enemies to our political and religious purity, and our social and civil peace, that now exists in the Union.'<sup>187</sup> Religious integrity and 'civil peace' were hardly distinct issues. As we have shown, the Romans almost envisioned a cause-and-effect relationship between the *pax deorum* and the *pax Romana*. Similarly, nineteenth-century religious leaders spoke of social harmony and politics whilst their political colleagues spoke of the injurious potential of superstition. There is perhaps no better example of the latter than the speech by General John Clark to the surrendered Mormons of Far West, Missouri in 1838 just moments after explaining that the latter must leave the state or face death:

I am sorry, gentlemen, to see so great a number of apparently intelligent men found in the situation that you are; and, oh! that I could invoke the spirit of the unknown God to rest upon you, and deliver you from that awful chain of superstition, and liberate you from those fetters of fanaticism with which you are bound. I would advise you to scatter abroad and never again organise with

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<sup>185</sup> J.H. Beadle, 'The Mormon Theocracy,' *Scribner's Monthly* 14.3(1876): 391.

<sup>186</sup> This is one element of Terry Givens' basic argument in *The Viper on the Hearth* mentioned previously.

<sup>187</sup> Jonathan Turner, *Mormonism in All Ages* (New York: Platt and Peters, 1842), 3.



Bishops, Presidents, &c., lest you excite the jealousies of the people, and subject yourselves to the same calamities that have now come upon you.<sup>188</sup>

Ostensibly linking belief to behaviour, Clark spoke with authority and lamented the ‘fanaticism’ that drove the Mormons to act in a manner not consonant with their surroundings. However, the criminal activities and socially subversive actions that came to be associated with the early Latter-day Saints were more frequently cited as the reasons for anti-Mormon efforts than any overtly religious or doctrinal criticisms. The latter are discussed in the following section of the study, but it is important to first acknowledge that attacks on Mormonism followed a similar trajectory to those levelled against the second-century Christians. The earliest societal conflicts, such as those with vigilante mobs intent on harming and forcing the relocation of their Mormon neighbours, tended to focus on alleged crimes and political threats instead of doctrinal idiosyncrasies.<sup>189</sup> In addition to emphasising the supposed *flagitia* of the early Christians, opponents such as Celsus relied on rhetorical poignancy to sway their audiences. In the case of opposition to early Mormonism, the two were often combined to great effect. The aforementioned ubiquity of printing presses only exacerbated the situation, and the followers of Joseph Smith found themselves in the midst of a society as eager to categorise the new religion as it was indiscriminate about its sources. As the age of democracy flourished, individuals brandished more power than ever before. Yet, relegating everyone to the same social plane meant cacophonous competition; upstarts and novelties were countered by polemics and diatribes.

### *Appellations and Categories: Raging Rhetoric*

In chapter two, it was noted that Walter Scott, editor of the Campbellite periodical *The Evangelist*, called the Latter-day Saints ‘impostors’ and a ‘vile sect’. These pejorative descriptors were repeatedly ascribed to the Mormons during their early years. J.Spencer Fluhman notes both the variety of name-calling that took place and the manner by which these appellations mark the stages of Mormonism’s fight to be recognised as a religion. Displaying remarkably thorough scholarship, Fluhman

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<sup>188</sup> E. Robinson and D.C. Smith, eds., ‘A History of the Persecution, of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter Day Saints in Missouri,’ *Times and Seasons* 1.12(October 1840): 177.

<sup>189</sup> LeSueur, 247.

cites numerous examples of anti-Mormon polemical rhetoric; the Latter-day Saints and their new faith were called ‘impostors’, ‘dupes’, ‘delusional’, a ‘superstition’, ‘magic’, and ‘folk magic’.<sup>190</sup> Echoing the pagans early in the Common Era, those who opposed the Mormons tended to withhold credibility by deeming the new group not a religious community but a ‘superstition’ or an assemblage of ‘dupes’ who share a fondness for ‘folk magic’. Richard Livesey, an American Methodist minister, wrote an 1838 pamphlet summarising Mormonism.<sup>191</sup> Within the first paragraph, Livesey refers to the community as a ‘delusion’ and an ‘imposture’. Later, Livesey quotes from W. Parrish, a past secretary of Joseph Smith, who likewise describes the Latter-day Saints as ‘infidels’, ‘bigots’, and a ‘superstition’. Even those who appeared to be free of an agenda against the upstart religious sect found it difficult to see past the apparent credulity of Smith’s followers. Historian Robert Baird perpetuated this trend by including the Mormons in his *Religion in America* and describing them as ‘dupes’ who possess an ‘ignorant character’.<sup>192</sup>

Recognition, however, often bridges the divide between the experience of heresy and the resolution implicit in the group’s developing soteriology. When early Christians continued to be accused of heinous crimes, Justin came to their defence. An insider, Justin’s basic argument hinged on his concession that there could be individuals somewhere who call themselves Christians and commit such atrocities, but the Christianity with which he was familiar did not. It is no surprise that various Mormons shouldered the same challenge after enduring years of continuous verbal affronts. The extreme rhetoric of many non-Mormons could provoke much of the same from those within the fold. After withstanding insults like those uttered by Samuel Owens who identified Mormons as a ‘tribe of locusts’ and a ‘mass of human corruption’, Parley Pratt responded with parallel language.<sup>193</sup> In *Mormonism Unveiled* (the title of which was also intended to reflect the wording of an anti-Mormon publication, *Mormonism Unvailed*[sic] by E.D. Howe), Pratt attacked the

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<sup>190</sup> J. Spencer Fluhman, ‘A Peculiar People’: *Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 35-47, 51-5.

<sup>191</sup> Richard Livesey, *An Exposure of Mormonism* (Wrexham: Ecclesia Press, 1997).

<sup>192</sup> Robert Baird, *Religion in America* (New York: Harper, 1856), 571, 574.

<sup>193</sup> Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, eds., *The Mormon Experience* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 47.

readers of an agonistic publication, *Zion's Watchman*, by stating that they were 'deluded' by the 'impositions' found therein.<sup>194</sup> His vitriol climaxed with an *ad hominem* blow to the moral probity of the publication's editor who Pratt asserted ranked among 'dogs, sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, and idolaters.'<sup>195</sup> As previously stated, the relative ease with which a private printing press was secured allowed the diatribes of this period to be carried to and fro in the form of pamphlets and newspapers. Pratt's choice to rebut the accusations of his opponents by composing a published essay is a striking example of the preferred *modus operandi*. It is not overstating the point to claim that the entire issue of societal heresy and conflict is manifestly captured in the rivalries between periodicals in early Mormon history. The pro-Mormon newspapers *Times & Seasons* and *The Wasp* were consistently combated by the anti-Mormon sentiments and critical commentaries printed by *The Warsaw Signal* and the *Nauvoo Expositor*.<sup>196</sup>

At other times, however, members of the opposed group attempted to offer more equable refutations. Of some note is Francis Bishop's 1839 text concerning LDS 'sufferings in the state of Missouri'.<sup>197</sup> A few years after its publication Bishop was excommunicated and organised a schismatic group, but in 1839 he was a leading member of the Mormon community that had just been expelled from Missouri. Bishop offers a denial of the accusations of the Missourians:

We say, we challenge the world to prove that we, as a church or people, have ever cherished or inculcated the least unwholesome principle, or that we have injured a person either in reputation, or have molested them in the peaceable enjoyment of their civil rights.<sup>198</sup>

Beyond this, though, Bishop notably refers to his own religious collective as both a 'church' and a 'society'.<sup>199</sup> These countering categories are important for they not only suggest legitimacy but borrow directly from the vernacular of the dominant

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<sup>194</sup> Parley P. Pratt, *Mormonism Unveiled* (New York: O. Pratt & E. Fordham, 1838), 4.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> The *Nauvoo Expositor* was established by dissenting Mormons in Nauvoo, Illinois and only published one volume before Smith and his co-conspirators razed the printing house.

<sup>197</sup> Francis G. Bishop, *A Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter Day Saints* (Salem: Blum & Son, 1839).

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 2.

Protestant culture in which churches and societies were the primary, acceptable purveyors of moral instruction and social norms. The nation was growing increasingly familiar with novel religious expressions, but it was particularly uneasy about those that appeared to embrace an authoritarian structure that ‘deluded’ its members into possessing seditious notions.

*Social Subversion: Race Relations and Democracy*

The abundance of documentation available for an analysis of Mormon beginnings serves to complicate the endeavour because all of the cloudiness remains in the picture. For our brief look at the second century, it was possible to establish certain constants and proceed with a description of the ways by which Christians challenged those norms. Thus, cultural mainstays such as paganism or the imperial cult were seen as the institutions subverted by Christianity. The context of early Mormonism, or any religious context for that matter, was not necessarily any different. Social norms existed, and the new group was seen as a threat. Our challenge, however, is to select representative tensions from the myriad options. Many voices entered the fray, and just as many reasons were given for the existence of such conflict. The succeeding paragraphs address the issue of social subversion and its relation to the societal heresy directed at the Mormons. For the sake of a focused argument, we highlight both the manner in which early Mormonism was a competing, exclusivist society and the charges brought against Smith and his followers concerning contentious racial allegiances.

Though he may overstate the case, Leo Pfeffer offers insight into religious marginalisation in America: ‘In the United States theology plays no role either in marginality or legitimation...marginality is essentially a function not of theological unorthodoxy but of tension with particular secular interests.’<sup>200</sup> For the opponents of early Mormonism, those secular interests were many. Typically articulated in terms of economic and political danger, the primary threat that Mormons posed was persuasive power. To aver that Mormons were dupes was not solely to question their intelligence or gullibility but to lament their loyalty to a competing societal force. As David Brion Davis propounds, the conflict surrounding early Mormons and their

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<sup>200</sup> Leo Pfeffer, ‘The Legitimation of Marginal Religions in the United States,’ *Religious Movements in Contemporary America*, eds. Irving I. Zaretsky and Mark P. Leone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 10.

neighbours stemmed from 'a contest for economic and political power between western settlers and a group that voluntarily withdrew from society.'<sup>201</sup> Davis asserts that anti-Mormonism assumed a nativist mode; the nascent religious movement being perceived in much the same way as Irish Catholics, for instance. It is certainly true that those opposing the Mormons often directed resentment toward the latter for being an ostensibly separate people. Regardless of whether the societal heresy resembled ethnic tensions or not, it is indubitable that early Mormonism came to represent a social threat simply because its insularity recognisably removed members from the established social systems of justice and popular decision.<sup>202</sup> In this way, it seemed 'to embody those traits that were precise antitheses of American ideals.'<sup>203</sup> Ironically, one of the religious sects that owed its very existence to the democratisation of religion quickly came to represent the opposite: a dubious, authoritarian, parallel society.

By the 1840s, Joseph Smith and his disciples understood themselves as a complete society.<sup>204</sup> At this stage in our discussion, space does not permit a fuller explication of early Mormon concepts such as mission and restoration. It is imperative, however, that one consider these motivating ideas in relation to the formation of an exclusive subculture within a pluralistic nation. The Mormons and their antagonists demonstrated the reciprocal, or dialectical, nature of social conflict by allowing insider and outsider perspectives to develop in conjunction with one another. In other words, it was true that 'the exclusiveness of Mormon society was a predominant feature of the public's perception of the sect', just as it was true that Mormons invoked the Jewish term 'gentile' in order to delineate between the faithfulness of the 'Saints' and the errant ways of non-Mormons.<sup>205</sup> Givens is correct in his observation concerning the Mormons use of such language: 'The Mormon practice of referring to all outsiders as 'gentiles' is therefore not to be seen as

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<sup>201</sup> David Brion Davis, 'Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature,' *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47.2(1960): 206.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 213; Richard L. Bushman, 'Mormon Persecutions in Missouri, 1833,' *BYU Studies* 3.1(1960): 18. Bushman argues that all persecution directed at Mormonism assumed that the Latter-day Saints were 'an alien society' exhibiting unexpected 'patterns of human behaviour.'

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>204</sup> Bowman, 71.

<sup>205</sup> Givens, *Viper on the Hearth*, 54.

historically naive posturing, but as the transformation of a literal indicator of chosenness into a metaphor for a special difference that must be constructed.<sup>206</sup> Even so, the early followers of Smith and their adversaries saw the construction of this difference for precisely what it was: a competition for influence/loyalty.

When non-Mormons in Missouri witnessed the organisation of an elite, militant group of Latter-day Saints called the Danites and the political meddling of Joseph Smith and other Mormons in local elections, hostility rapidly escalated. The Danites explicitly rejected the authority of local laws whilst Mormon involvement in politics amounted to little more than overt power plays by Smith who could guarantee the *en bloc* voting of his followers.<sup>207</sup> Citizens of surrounding communities grew increasingly agitated over the presence of such a religious faction: ‘...for no body politic could be asked to tolerate a power that was designed to destroy it.’<sup>208</sup> Therefore, some politicians like William Peniston turned to denigration, calling the Mormons ‘thieves, liars, counterfeiters, and dupes...’<sup>209</sup> By 1842, one outspoken ex-Mormon fumed over the subversive prowess of Smith and his devotees. John Bennett published a lengthy tirade against the Mormons in which he accuses them of ‘infidelity, deism, atheism, lying, deception, blasphemy, debauchery, lasciviousness, bestiality, madness, fraud, plunder, larceny, burglary, robbery, perjury, fornication, adultery, rape, incest, arson, treason, and murder.’<sup>210</sup> Naturally, the influential Mormon figure Sidney Rigdon wrote that such claims were unfounded and ‘monstrous’, concluding that anyone who believed ‘such outlandish representations’ must possess ‘a large stock of moral courage’.<sup>211</sup> It is significant that these rather sensational charges point to the height of incivility and disorder. By the 1840s, little had changed since Roman governors listened to allegations of Christian incest and atheism.

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>207</sup> LeSueur, 42-3.

<sup>208</sup> Davis, 212.

<sup>209</sup> LeSueur, 61.

<sup>210</sup> John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints; or, An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842), 257.

<sup>211</sup> HC, 5.15

The social subversion of which the Mormons were accused also took patently nineteenth-century American forms. Race relations were gaining ground as a key political issue in Jacksonian America. Rapport between white settlers and Native Americans remained strained and inconsistent, and abolitionism was a burgeoning, if alternative, position in the young nation. Once again, the Mormons seemed to touch all of the most contentious topics of the day. The Book of Mormon introduced the notion that Native Americans ('Lamanites') were distantly related to ancient Israelites; within six months of Joseph Smith establishing his church, he sent missionaries to Native American tribes in the western borderlands of America.<sup>212</sup> A few years later, the English traveller Edward Abdy affirmed that the persecution of Mormons in the state of Missouri was a direct result of the religious group's amiable relationship with Native Americans.<sup>213</sup> Similarly, the early Latter-day Saints were accused of harbouring blacks and being proponents of abolition. The majority of the earliest Mormons were originally from New England, and their outsider status in areas like Missouri and Illinois only exacerbated the tension arising from accusations of Mormonism supporting anti-slavery efforts. Indeed, some believers were of African descent, a fact not ignored by their enemies. This was interpreted as Mormon attempts to pit slave against slave driver, and newspaper articles to this effect succeeded in convincing many that Smith was capable of this type of sedition.<sup>214</sup> Perhaps one federal soldier spoke for many when he penned these ominous words for the *New York Herald* in 1842: 'The time will come when this gathering host of religious fanatics will make this country shake to its centre.'<sup>215</sup>

For the early Latter-day Saints, however, this sort of societal heresy only fuelled the deifying bent of the opposed group's soteriology which, in turn, further reinforced the exclusivist mentality. The steady but gradual lean toward deification that took place in early Mormon belief was itself indicative of a form of Berger's cosmisation; the group's exclusivity was imbued with authoritative sacrality. Their uniqueness in society came to be articulated more and more in terms of their

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<sup>212</sup> BOC 30:7

<sup>213</sup> Edward S. Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States*, quoted in *Viper on the Hearth*, by Terryl Givens, 56.

<sup>214</sup> Arrington and Bitton, 49.

<sup>215</sup> Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 274.

uniqueness within God's plan. Standing outside of the social order went hand in hand with aberrant theology.

### **Doctrinal Heresy**

Givens says that the earliest opposition to Mormonism 'was to its beliefs, not its practices.'<sup>216</sup> Earlier, we included the argument between those who agree with Givens' assessment and those who argue that the opposition, almost unfailingly, was about politics or economics.<sup>217</sup> This, as we mentioned, is one of the primary difficulties in reconstructing Mormonism's past. Above, it is noted that early Mormons desired and projected their own separate society, and the ensuing conflict with non-Mormons seemed almost inevitable because of that. Even so, non-Mormons exhibited intense anxiety about Smith's teachings, prophetic claims, and LDS religiosity in general.<sup>218</sup> It must also be accepted that ministers from other Christian denominations often led the opposition.<sup>219</sup> Perhaps the only worthwhile conclusion is that it is not the historian's lens that is fogged, but the specimen under scrutiny.

America, then as now, found it immensely difficult to delineate between religion and politics. The land of religious liberty maintained some key stipulations. Baird wrote that religious freedom was only extended to groups 'whose religious principles were not thought subversive of the great moral principles of Christianity.'<sup>220</sup> The German scholar Philip Schaff echoed Baird a few years after Smith's death when he reported back to his countrymen concerning American religion and culture: 'American toleration, as we have before remarked, has its limitations; the separation of church and state by no means involves a separation of the nation from

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<sup>216</sup> Givens, *Viper on the Hearth*, 58.

<sup>217</sup> Hallwas and Launius, 4. These two scholars seem to disagree with Givens, at least as it relates to the persecutions in Illinois during the 1840s. Instead of the conflict arising due to doctrinal or religious disagreement, Hallwas and Launius argue that the historical record actually suggests that the struggle was between two incompatible cultures, the Mormon theocratic propensities and the democratic ideology of the surrounding area.

<sup>218</sup> Fluhman, 54.

<sup>219</sup> LeSueur, 56. Presbyterian minister Sashel Woods, for instance, led a gang of one hundred men on horseback to the town of DeWitt, Missouri and 'shot up the town, taking prisoners and threatening the Mormon inhabitants.'

<sup>220</sup> Baird, 252.



Christianity...'<sup>221</sup> Regarding Mormons specifically, he continued: 'This much is certain, that the Mormons and the Americans...do not fit together, but have a deadly hatred of each other.'<sup>222</sup> These observations invoke religion generally, and Christianity particularly, as central to the tussles between America and its people.

For early Mormonism, the seamless blend of religion and politics was equally present among insiders and outsiders. From the outsider's perspective, Joseph Smith and his colleagues were both religious and insidious, the former a cloak for the latter. As one outsider opined, 'They lie by revelation, swindle by revelation, cheat and defraud by revelation, run away by revelation and if they do not mend their ways, I fear they will at last be damned by revelation.'<sup>223</sup> Another opponent believed that the Latter-day Saints were succeeding because they retained many of the beliefs shared by the Christian denominations whilst appealing 'strongly to the love of the marvellous, to that thirst and anxiety, so rife with a certain class of mind, to know more than God would have us know...'<sup>224</sup> This latter quote comes from E.G. Lee who composed *Knavery Exposed*, an anti-Mormon text from 1841. Lee's words, as one can see, were less harsh than those mentioned in Chapter One by Peter Bauder who saw Mormon growth as deception of the people by a 'diabolical system'. These exposés were the preferred means of refutation during the early nineteenth century. Before probing more of the insiders' perspectives in subsequent sections, we now list and discuss the many anti-Mormon texts of the time, emphasising the cases in which Protestant leaders led the attacks on this nascent movement.

### *The Saints Exposed!*

Whether motivated by fear of Mormon political dominance or a genuine concern for the propagation of theological truth, much of the overt antagonism directed at early Mormons came from clerics of other Christian traditions. Although it betrays a grave misunderstanding of Joseph Smith's original scripture and the

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<sup>221</sup> Philip Schaff, *America: A Sketch of Its Political, Social, and Religious Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 200.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>223</sup> Livesey, 12.

<sup>224</sup> E.G. Lee, *The Mormons, or Knavery Exposed*, quoted in Stephen J. Fleming, "'Congenial to Almost Every Shade of Radicalism": The Delaware Valley and the Success of Early Mormonism,' *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 17.2(2007): 139.

latter's role within the LDS community, the name Mormonites was first ascribed to the Latter-day Saints by outsiders, particularly Protestant ministers, who sought to mock Smith and his followers whilst unequivocally differentiating between followers of the Bible and followers of the Book of Mormon.<sup>225</sup> Their name, however, was not all that the early Mormons received from competing religious leaders. Some of the harshest criticism, not unexpectedly, came from those who disagreed with some or all of Smith's teachings

One possible reason for the confusion over the actual motivations of these early religious critics may be that it was Smith's claims to revelation and authority, for both the Book of Mormon as well as his own proclamations, that roused the greatest indignation. That being so, it is easy to suggest that the preachers and advocates of other denominations saw the Mormons as wily cheaters, poaching unsuspecting religious seekers from those sects that all agreed to play by orthodox rules. Offering new scriptures and ongoing communications with God hardly seemed fair. This certainly appears to be important to some of those early opponents. Campbell, mentioned earlier, composed an exposé entitled *Delusions, An Analysis of the Book of Mormon*. As Thomas Alexander notes, Campbell rejected authority claims much more so than theological particulars.<sup>226</sup> Likewise, Livesey focused on the credibility of the Book of Mormon, arguing that the text was fraudulent.<sup>227</sup> For Benjamin Morris, a missionary of the American Home Missionary Society, the Mormons were led by a 'despot' who possessed 'unlimited influence' over his followers.<sup>228</sup> This was more than one missionary's despair over the waxing clout of Joseph Smith; Morris seized the opportunity to point out in his 1841 report from the Illinois missionary field that the Latter-day Saints primarily consisted of converts from 'those churches where the great cardinal doctrines of the Bible are kept rather *in the back ground*. (original emphasis)<sup>229</sup> By implication, this was a Christian battle

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<sup>225</sup> Bowman, introduction, xiv.

<sup>226</sup> Thomas G. Alexander, 'The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine,' *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 57.

<sup>227</sup> Livesey, 3.

<sup>228</sup> B.F. Morris, 'A Minister Criticizes Warsaw and Nauvoo,' *Cultures in Conflict*, eds. John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), 34.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

against an undesired social power that might be won by proper, directed adherence to sound teaching.

Thus, others challenged the specific theological assertions of the Mormons. In such cases, it would be difficult to speculate about the possibility of additional, veiled motives. Oliver Barr, a member of the Christian Connection – an inter-denominational movement in the early nineteenth century which overlapped with the Millerites and Campbellites – who held a binitarian view of God, exchanged a series of letters with a Mormon elder Stephen Post in 1837 and 1838. A theological debate of sorts, the correspondence led Barr to question the apparent modalism of the Mormons as well as their avowal of divine corporeality.<sup>230</sup> For German Reformed minister Diedrich Willers, Joseph Smith and his Book of Mormon represented the ‘greatest fraud’ of the period, but Willers demonstrates the inseparability of anxiety over religious competition and disquiet concerning ‘new doctrines’.<sup>231</sup> The Book of Mormon was a devious threat, yes; but Willers felt compelled to refute Mormon doctrines and warn his congregation about their falsity.

Representing what seems to be the most sincere pole on the spectrum of anti-Mormon exposés, Presbyterian minister Truman Coe’s article in *The Ohio Observer* set out to educate readers on the foundations of LDS origins and beliefs. Coe denied the authenticity of Mormonism’s claims, but he extended ‘Christian charity’ by submitting that the followers of Joseph Smith were ‘industrious, good neighbours, very sincerely deceived, and possibly very sincere Christians.’<sup>232</sup> Coe was eager for his readers, assumed to be Protestants themselves, to avoid the pitfalls of bias and mockery: ‘The prevalence of religious delusion is not to be attributed so much to mere ignorance, as to the structure and prejudices and pernicious habits of the mind, a predisposition to be captivated with anything that is new or wonderful.’<sup>233</sup> In this way, Coe functioned as doctrinal heresy of an irenic variety, decrying doctrine without resorting to excessive rhetoric or hurtful polemic. Regardless of their approach, individuals like Campbell, Willers, and Coe concurred: the Mormons were

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<sup>230</sup> Dan Vogel, ‘The Earliest Mormon Concept of God,’ *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 25.

<sup>231</sup> Diedrich Willers, ‘1830 Letter to “Reverend Brethren”,’ n.p.

<sup>232</sup> Truman Coe, ‘Mormonism,’ *The Ohio Observer* (11 August 1836): 4.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

misguided. As a monolithic front, this outside opposition was often combated with derivative tactics; as we saw, Parley Pratt penned *Mormonism Unveiled* in part as a mimicking answer to *Mormonism Unvailed*[sic].<sup>234</sup> Internal conflict – reflecting a more traditional understanding of heresy in which threatening competition emerges from within – proved more pestilent, lifting politics to the fore and provoking devastating violence.

### *Dissent and Division: Heresy Within*

In Chapter One, we cited the definition of heresy offered by Kurtz: the heretic is a ‘deviant insider’. Kurtz edges closer than many other social scientists to the traditional understanding of heresy but stops short, insisting that orthodoxy develops during the ‘heat of escalating conflict’ with heresy. For the case of the early Mormons, Kurtz’s view provides meaningful insight. The LDS soteriology explored in the following chapter did not emerge in its most distinct form until around 1844, the year of Joseph Smith’s death and in the midst of certain, concentrated discord with Mormon dissenters. When studying the various forms of heresy encountered by the Mormons, it is imperative than one address the topic of dissenters as one significant source of consternation and theological stimulation.

Within one year of Mormonism’s founding, converts began leaving the church. Of those in attendance at a church conference in September 1831, for example, approximately twenty-four exited the community shortly thereafter.<sup>235</sup> Foreshadowing various elements of his innovative soteriology, one of Smith’s revelations from 1834 chastised those who stirred up conflict from within:

Behold, I say unto you, were it not for the transgressions of my people, speaking concerning the church and not individuals, they might have been redeemed even now. But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil...And are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom...And my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Pratt’s pamphlet was in direct response to LaRoy Sunderland’s criticisms published in the Methodist paper *Zion’s Watchman*, but there can be little doubt that his title choice reflected familiarity with the early anti-Mormon work by Howe.

<sup>235</sup> Bowman, 53.

<sup>236</sup> D&C 105:2-6

In addition to mentioning the celestial kingdom and the role of suffering in the process of learning obedience (two crucial aspects of early Mormon soteriology), the revelation directly addressed the pressing concern of division within the group. Concern was not unfounded; within a few short years, Joseph Smith and his closest assistant Sidney Rigdon were forced to leave Ohio due to the unrelenting tension with disaffected believers who questioned the LDS leaders' financial aims. The church had attempted to establish a bank and experimented with a communitarian structure in which members signed over their possessions to the church for equal distribution. As member John Corrill recalled in his history of the group, these decisions created distrust and jealousy 'to a great height, so that, instead of pulling together as brethren; they tried every way in their power...to destroy each other.'<sup>237</sup>

The conflict continued to intensify. By the time the Mormons were driven out of Missouri and arrived in Hancock County, Illinois the stage was set for a fateful clash between dissidents and devotees. William Law and his brother, Wilson Law became two of the most prominent and infamous dissenters in Illinois. It is thought that Wilson authored a set of poems that appeared in a local newspaper during the spring of 1844 in which Mormon leaders were called out for their practice of polygamy and Joseph Smith was portrayed as a 'tyrant' and a 'lustful beast'.<sup>238</sup> Though the poetry was published anonymously, the attack by Wilson's brother was more audacious. Excommunicated in April 1844, William Law quickly set up a printing press and decided to publish a periodical exposing the polygamous behaviours and other indiscretions of Smith and his colleagues. As he and his co-editors expressed it, 'We are earnestly seeking to explode the vicious principles of Joseph Smith, and those who practice the same abominations and whoredoms...'<sup>239</sup> In the first and only issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, Law included a revealing passage about the Mormon founder from a nearby paper called the *Quincy Whig*: 'It is not so much the particular doctrines...however abominable they may be in themselves, that

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<sup>237</sup> John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis: Thomas Watson & Sons, 1839), 27. Hereafter, *Brief History*.

<sup>238</sup> 'An Exposé Poem on Smith's Polygamy,' *Cultures in Conflict*, eds. John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), 133-38.

<sup>239</sup> 'Preamble,' *Nauvoo Expositor* (7 June 1844).

our citizens care about – as it is the anti-republican nature of the organisation, over which he has almost supreme control...’<sup>240</sup>

Thus, the internal heresy pointed to the same fear exhibited by many of the outside opponents; Mormonism was despotic and socially subversive. In response to William Law’s publication, Joseph Smith called a city council meeting to discuss the possible courses of action available to the LDS leaders. Following Smith’s guidance, the council decided to raze the press and, in doing so, physically crush that symbol of resistance and unrest. Destroying the *Nauvoo Expositor* set in motion a series of events that culminated in Joseph Smith’s assassination at the hands of an outraged mob inside the small city jail of Carthage, Illinois. Yet, the Mormons’ choice to demolish their opponents’ property bore a strong resemblance to earlier suffering that was directed at the young religious movement. Within months of the church’s establishment, for instance, local ministers in New York demolished a dam built by the Mormons for the baptism of new converts.<sup>241</sup> Such violence seemed to follow the early Mormons. Indeed, a chain of physical opposition spanned the distance between those local religious leaders tearing down the Mormon dam and Mormon leaders levelling the printing press of dissidents.

### **Personal Heresy**

Years before Joseph Smith was held in Carthage Jail, he spent time incarcerated in Missouri. From the latter, he wrote a letter to his followers that was subsequently canonised as section 123 of Doctrine and Covenants. Directing the Mormons to record the details of the persecutions they had suffered, Smith claimed that the effort to document such affliction was ‘an imperative duty’ owed to ‘wives and children...widows and fatherless, whose husbands and fathers have been murdered...’<sup>242</sup> Mormonism’s enemies were characterised as a single, malevolent force, an ‘iron hand’ whose ‘dark and blackening deeds are enough to make hell itself shudder, and to stand aghast and pale, and the hands of the very devil to tremble and palsy.’<sup>243</sup> The letter was perpetuating a persecuted identity that would not only gain

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> HC, 1.9

<sup>242</sup> D&C 123:9

<sup>243</sup> D&C 123:10

greater propulsion from Smith's death at the hands of his opponents but would come to shape much of Mormonism's self-understanding for over a century.<sup>244</sup>

In many ways, this martyrdom mentality was present among the Mormons from their earliest days. We have already shown that the Book of Mormon itself proposed a divine purpose for opposition. The prevalence and centrality of this mindset is seen in Joseph Smith's repeated self-identification with the Joseph of the Old Testament who was persecuted at the hands of his brothers and with Enoch who is spared death because of his faithfulness and righteousness.<sup>245</sup> A persecution motif also runs throughout Smith's collected revelations. Although the passages were removed from the Doctrine and Covenants in the early twentieth century, the 1835 edition included 'Lectures of Faith' in which the Mormon leader encouraged his followers to persevere in their suffering because the 'pure and unadulterated religion of heaven' will always be persecuted 'to the uttermost'. Anticipating the deifying element of his later soteriology, Smith emphasised that suffering was necessary to become 'joint heirs with Christ Jesus'.<sup>246</sup> This sort of response, continuing throughout the fourteen years of Smith's leadership, certainly established a foundation for the soteriological schema that would go far to resolve the heresy encountered during Mormonism's early years; but were such discourses purely rhetorical? Perhaps not.

One year before the 'Lectures of Faith' were presented before a class of Mormon elders, a meeting of their opponents gathered in Missouri to discuss the undesired influx of Latter-day Saints. In the meeting, Reverend Finis Ewing shared his belief that 'the "Mormons" are the common enemies of mankind and ought to be destroyed.'<sup>247</sup> After Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs signed orders permitting the 'extermination' of Mormons in Missouri in 1838, a group of their adversaries opened fire on a number of the Latter-day Saints who were seeking refuge in a nearby mill. Many of the Mormons were killed, including children. Violence, rage, and the

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<sup>244</sup> E.E. Ericksen, *The Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1975), 9.

<sup>245</sup> D&C1835 75:1-2. Smith's identification with Enoch is also noted in our next chapter as an example of early Mormon preoccupation with conquering death.

<sup>246</sup> D&C1835 Lecture 6:4,12

<sup>247</sup> William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons: Historical Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 76.

aforementioned faith in vigilantism prevailed on both sides of the conflict. Yet, the aggression displayed toward early Mormonism does lend veracity to the ongoing revelations and orations of Joseph Smith concerning his community's experiences. In keeping with our earlier assessment of the personal heresy faced by second-century Christians, the following pages illuminate Mormon persecution by focusing on specific texts.<sup>248</sup> John Corrill's *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* provides a balanced and historically reliable account of early Mormon suffering and conflict. After Corrill, attention is then placed on the insider perspective. This is achieved by highlighting Joseph Smith's own history of the events.

#### *John Corrill's Account*

John Corrill was an influential member of the Latter-day Saints during the mid to late 1830s. In Far West, Missouri, Corrill witnessed and spoke out against the first wave of unjust persecution against the Mormons. One of his letters outlining the false and sensational allegations made against his group appeared in the June 1834 issue of the Mormon periodical *The Evening and Morning Star*. In the letter, Corrill claimed that the anti-Mormon mobs were spreading rumours accusing the Mormons of murderous intentions: 'They tell [the citizens] that the "Mormons" are coming upon them, mob like, to kill their women and children.'<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, the vigilantes burned many of the Mormons' houses. Even so, Corrill concluded his letter with a hopeful tone, believing that the 'laws of the land' would prevail.<sup>250</sup>

This optimism and equanimity persisted. For example, Corrill presented a 'memorial' to Missouri state legislature after the 1838 expulsion of the Mormons from that state, questioning the legality of Governor Boggs' orders and petitioning for permission to remain. Yet, after it was revealed that many of the details in the petition were misleading, Corrill admitted that some of the LDS claims had been

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<sup>248</sup> One could choose to analyse other early writings such as Pratt's (mentioned earlier in this chapter) or Sidney Rigdon's 1840 pamphlet *An Appeal to the American People*. However, many of the alternative manuscripts employ debilitating, hyperbolic language and dense rhetoric. In Rigdon's account, there are also problems with his chronology that render the text much less beneficial than Corrill's.

<sup>249</sup> Oliver Cowdery, 'The Saints – Again,' *The Evening and Morning Star* 2.21(June 1834): 168.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.



falsified.<sup>251</sup> It appears that Corrill was already wavering by the time he was selected to present the 'memorial'. Over the tumultuous year of 1838, during which Mormons engaged in violent confrontation with their Missouri neighbours, Corrill became disenchanted with the leaders of his community. When he questioned Joseph Smith's recent revelations, the founding prophet directly threatened Corrill. As LeSueur reports, Corrill's response was to declare that 'he was a republican; consequently, he would do, say, act, and believe what he pleased.'<sup>252</sup>

Such a statement is instructive for our reconstruction of the context and minutiae of early Mormon persecution. History tends to homogenise and indurate what often was a complex and relatively amorphous chapter in time. John Corrill is interesting because his story reveals the existence of internal conflict related to the republican values of some believers set against the increasingly despotic policies of LDS authorities. Beyond this, however, his *Brief History* is beneficial because it recounts historical events in a reasonable and reliable manner.<sup>253</sup> Corrill surrendered his membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints shortly before publishing his 1839 history of the group. Prior to leaving, he had served as church historian, and that fact may account for his accessible style and even-handed approach.

In *Brief History*, Corrill expresses his own confusion over the reason for agonistic sentiments arising from non-Mormons in northern Missouri. Most of the Mormons had left the area around 1834 and 1835 but began returning in 1836. This caused unrest among the non-believers who lived in these counties. Corrill avers that the Mormons committed no crimes, and their enemies must either hate the new religion or fear that the Latter-day Saints will become a majority in the vicinity; the latter being a particularly dire threat in an ardently democratic environment.<sup>254</sup> Even so, no skirmishes arose because the locals met with the incoming Mormons and resolved their difference. The same, however, was not the case two years later.

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<sup>251</sup> LeSueur, 226-7.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>254</sup> Corrill, 26.

In 1838 and 1839, tensions erupted in Missouri. Decisions of state militia, local mobs, and gathered Mormons often reflected the movements of a chess match; the effort of one group determining the next action of another group. In some cases, reports were exaggerated or entirely false. For example, Corrill recalls a physical altercation between Mormons and others at the voting polls during a local election. Both sides clashed, utilising ‘clubs and boards’ to injure one another. Afterwards, rumours spread that two Mormons had been killed in the fray and a mob was gathered in Davies County intent on harming more Mormons.<sup>255</sup> After arriving in Davies County, however, Joseph Smith and a group of approximately one hundred and fifty men found no mob and no murder.

In other instances, though, vigilantism was used against the Mormons. Not long after the above occurrence, a mob of four thousand assembled and decided to drive the Mormons from Davies County. This was followed by a similar decision in the nearby county of Carroll.<sup>256</sup> The citizens of Carroll rode into the town of Far West in Caldwell County, the Mormon centre of the state, and took two Mormons prisoner. Corrill recalls these men exclaiming that ‘they meant to drive the Mormons from Davies to Caldwell, and from Caldwell to hell.’<sup>257</sup> What ensued is often called the Missouri Wars. Mormons and their enemies pillaged and burned the properties of the other. The Mormons exchanged gunfire with a gathering of state militiamen, killing the majority.<sup>258</sup> Non-Mormon mobs stole Mormon weapons, forced families out of homes, and took prisoners at random. At Haun’s Mill, at least twenty Latter-day Saints were killed by the congregated militia.

Throughout Corrill’s account, and consistent with his actions and other writings, relatively equal blame is placed on the Mormons and their adversaries. However, a degree of injustice surfaces in his inclusion of the legal measures subsequent to the violence. Thirty-six Mormons, including the leaders, were arrested and charged with crimes ranging from murder to larceny.<sup>259</sup> Various officers of the

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>257</sup> Corrill, 35.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 43.

militia, in comparison, not only committed similar acts such as arson but continued to steal horses, plunder homes, and shoot livestock even after the Mormon leaders were arrested.<sup>260</sup> These men were not arrested. Thus, LeSueur's comment recognising the legal bias against Mormonism included earlier in the present chapter appears to be corroborated by Corrill. The Mormons, primarily in the late 1830s and early 1840s, were guilty of violent crimes; yet they endured a special type of personal heresy in which legal rights are stripped without cause and society turns a blind eye to the comparable actions of those who pose little threat to the political and civil *status quo*. It seems fitting, then, that the Mormons were offered a pardon similar to the one extended to individuals accused of being Christians in the second century: in this case, renounce your faith and be permitted to reside in Missouri.<sup>261</sup>

#### *Joseph Smith: A Mormon Perspective*

The sort of injustice experienced by the Mormons during the duration of Joseph Smith's leadership undoubtedly reinforced their persecuted outlook. The early Mormons seemed to believe that they were genuinely innocent, victims of a dubious and fickle social system in which cries of religious tolerance ring out constantly but come to nought for those outside of the civil religious norm. After their experiences in Missouri, the Latter-day Saints sent at least eight hundred and twenty-three petitions signed by six hundred and eighty-three petitioners to the federal government seeking redress for the losses of or to property.<sup>262</sup> These impressive numbers indicate the level of Mormon certainty concerning their blamelessness. For their leader and founder, unreserved and unjustified opposition seemed consistent with the details of his life.

Indeed, at the age of six, young Joseph Smith contracted Typhoid fever, complications from which caused infection to spread to the bones of his left leg. An experimental surgery left the boy bloody, sweaty, and in total agony. He spent the next three years either bed-bound or using crutches.<sup>263</sup> This traumatic event must

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<sup>260</sup> Corrill, 44.

<sup>261</sup> LeSueur, 259.

<sup>262</sup> Clark Johnson, 'Missouri Persecutions: The Petition of Isaac Leany,' *BYU Studies* 23.1(1983): 94.

<sup>263</sup> Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 20-1.

have affected Smith in some way. Pain, as Davies acknowledges, often takes centre stage in the construction of identity.<sup>264</sup> This should not be overlooked when, as in the present study, various phenomena are studied by applying the complimentary assumptions and approaches of the sociology of knowledge and Mol's identity/adaptability dialectic. The former accounts for the social (or group) dynamic inherent in the identity-constructing process whilst Mol's ideas capture the propensity of individuals to form myths and rituals around meaningful events and roles. A painful childhood experience is precisely the sort of personal adversity we expect to see filtering through to a collective's developing belief system, if for no other reason than that the trauma demands explanation and, likewise, almost begs for narrative support.

We have already mentioned Smith's First Vision, the oppressive darkness that enshrouded him prior to the theophanic arrival of Jesus and the Father. Only a few years later, one month before Smith's eighteenth birthday in 1823, his older brother Alvin died due to complications from colic. Richard Bushman suggests that this event lifted Joseph to a more prominent position in the spiritual life of the Smith family: 'Where his father had failed in achieving religious unity, he succeeded.'<sup>265</sup> This success, however, was the outcome of inspiration derived from Alvin's death. It was no coincidence when, years later, the Mormon prophet instituted the 'patriarchal blessing' as a divine rite by establishing his father Joseph Senior as the official Patriarch just before experiencing a series of visions in which he saw his deceased brother alongside Adam, Abraham, and Jesus. As Davies points out, seeing Alvin in heaven prompted Smith to ponder the eternal fate of those who are unable to hear the gospel during their earthly lives and, subsequently, to posit and implement a ritual of baptism for the dead.<sup>266</sup> Thus, Bushman's comment is an astute one as it captures the

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<sup>264</sup> Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*, vi; *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition*, 110; William D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith, Jr. and the Dissociated Mind* (London: American Psychiatric Press, 1998), 7. Davies notes that little attention has been paid to Smith's leg surgery and its impact on his later life attitudes but recognises Morain as an exception. The latter attempts to apply concepts and approaches of modern psychology to the person of Joseph Smith. Morain asserts that Smith probably had formed his concept of self by the age of ten, about the time that he was able to recover fully from the leg injury.

<sup>265</sup> Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 46.

<sup>266</sup> Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition*, 25; *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 88. After noting various historical accounts associated with Alvin's death, including Joseph Smith Senior's exhumation of the corpse in order to rebut rumours that it had been dissected and the assertion by a

important overlap between the experience of Alvin's death, the assumption of greater religious and familial responsibility by Joseph (*ergo*, a sort of supersession of his father), and the resolving objective of early Mormon doctrines. In addition to Smith's leg surgery and the influential death of his older brother, Smith encountered difficult economic hardships throughout his life. In fact, Hansen postulates that the failed investments and agricultural ventures of Joseph Senior left the man psychologically feeble; Alvin's death was the breaking blow and contributed to the need for Joseph Junior's headship in the family.<sup>267</sup> Either way, there is ample evidence that the Smith's were one of many itinerant families whose peripatetic lifestyle was a product of financial necessity, trying to erase the slate after every loss.

Joseph Smith's troubles did not end as he reached adulthood. His perspective is adequately captured in the seven-volume *History of the Church*. Although Smith began the work around 1838 and 1839, its final form was not published until the early twentieth century. It is a fascinating record of the early years of Mormonism, at times sensational but always illuminating because of the insight it provides into the vantage of the movement's founder. The work begins with Smith's depiction of the First Vision and the persecution that purportedly ensued after he shared the experience with local Protestant ministers. Perhaps recollecting his childhood surgery or the sting of death following Alvin's passing, Smith claims that 'opposition and persecution...arose against me, almost in my infancy.'<sup>268</sup> After imparting details of the theophany with Christian leaders, Smith says,

I soon found...that my telling of the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase...and this was common among all the sects all united to persecute me.<sup>269</sup>

Though woeful, Smith explains that the same was true for those who accepted the authenticity of the Book of Mormon: 'Great opposition and much persecution followed the believers...'<sup>270</sup>

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local minister that Alvin had gone to hell, Davies concludes that the memory of Alvin's death was destined to have 'marked significance' for Joseph Smith.

<sup>267</sup> Hansen, 42.

<sup>268</sup> HC, 1.1

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 1.9

Whilst specific descriptions of the persecution are noticeably absent in the above statements, later passages from the same text include Smith's recollection of individual instances in which he was the victim of violence and injustice.<sup>271</sup> One example is his telling of the events of 24 March 1832. During the night, a mob pulled Smith from his bed and carried him outside. He was stripped of his clothes, choked, scratched, and covered with hot tar. His account provides many details including his noteworthy memory of the participation of Simonds Ryder, a Campbellite preacher. Another member of the mob jumped on top of Smith's prostrate body, scratching him 'like a mad cat' and proclaiming, 'God damn ye, that's the way the Holy Ghost falls on folks!'<sup>272</sup> It perhaps is telling that Smith recalled both the presence of Ryder (none of the other mob members are named) and the explicitly religious nature of the exclamation uttered by the individual who scratched the Mormon prophet. Again, the record's value lies in its offer of a glimpse into Smith's own construction of the past. To suggest a religious or doctrinal motive standing behind the mob's act would be to engage in too much speculation. Even so, elements such as Smith's emphasis on Ryder's complicity do hint at the Mormon founder's own personal understanding of the group's narrative; his position as a chosen prophet and restorer of truth (e.g., the gifts of the Holy Ghost) brought on the ire and aggression of religious competitors (heretics) like the Campbellites.

As time passed, Smith became increasingly angry over those acts he perceived to be unjustified persecution. Defending himself against the accusations of Mormon apostates only weeks before his death, the founder of Mormonism did not hold back: 'I have suffered more than Paul did. I should be like a fish out of water, if I were out of persecutions...The Lord has constituted me so curiously that I glory in persecution.'<sup>273</sup> In the end, Smith was murdered by a mob diverse in its composition but almost poetic in its representation of Jacksonian America: city militia members

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<sup>271</sup> In addition to the first chapter of *History of the Church*, a quintessential example of Smith's vague but rhetorically strong discussion of Mormon persecution is found in the portion of his letter from Liberty Jail that was not included in the canonized version: 'Oh!...the inhumanity and murderous disposition of this people. It shocks all nature it beggers and defies all description. It is a tail of woe lamentable tail yea a sorrifull tail too much to tell too much for contemplation too much to think of for a moment to much for human beings...' (original spelling and grammar)

<sup>272</sup> HC, 1.19

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 6.19

and private vigilantes from multiple towns, some were tried for the crime but all were acquitted.<sup>274</sup>

### **Ferment and Fecundity**

Addressing the magnitude of internal division in the Mormon Church just prior to the ruinous outbreak of conflict in Missouri, Corrill contended ‘that if the Church had been let alone by the citizens, they would have divided and subdivided so as to have completely destroyed themselves and their power, as a people, in a short time.’<sup>275</sup> Yet, it was Sidney Rigdon whose prediction was correct. Echoing Tertullian’s bold claim that ‘the blood of Christians is seed’, Rigdon recognised the social benefit of attacks by anti-Mormons: ‘...every attempt of the kind has only excited inquiry, awakened curiosity, and caused investigation, which have, in every instance, resulted in an increase of members to the Church...’<sup>276</sup> The heresy faced by both early Christians and early Mormons bred solidarity within each group.

What is more, these experiences engendered innovative theological expressions. Irenaeus and Joseph Smith, as well as the collectives they represent, serve as examples of religious adherents who perceive themselves to be innocent victims. So long as aggression is felt and internalised, it may be interpreted as persecution and allowed to engender fresh theologising. We agree with David Buerger when he says that ‘important doctrines developed when outside forces and movements focused Smith’s attention on a problem in a particular way.’<sup>277</sup> Social heresy forces a certain configuration of beliefs. As is explored in the next chapter, these constructions are often complex soteriological schemas that integrate the heresy; explaining it, legitimating it, and preparing for it. Hansen’s description of Smith’s religious objective is a fitting outline of the comprehensive soteriologies that can emerge from agonistic experiences. Smith wanted reform ‘that would obviate distinctions between the secular and the religious, between church and state, between

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<sup>274</sup> Bowman, 90.

<sup>275</sup> Corrill, 45.

<sup>276</sup> HC, 5.15

<sup>277</sup> David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 41.

heaven and earth, and create a seamless web encompassing the entirety of existence, past, present, and future.<sup>278</sup>

As Nathan Adler notes, in their collective reaction to such agonistic heresies, antinomian groups often posit ‘an apocalyptic sense of the “last days.”’ In such groups, Adler also observed individual members ‘renouncing family, traditional marriage, and jobs; establishing their own small communities and their own new rituals’ wherein ‘trances, visions, talking in tongues, possession, and other ecstatic behaviour’ became common.<sup>279</sup> We could, of course, point to polygamy and the veneration of ‘works of the spirit’ in Mormonism as examples of the same phenomena Adler mentions. Certainly, both second-century Christians and early Mormons exhibited a strong sense of apocalypticism. One must be careful, however, to avoid exaggerating the novelty of the teachings of Joseph Smith and Irenaeus. Both inherited much from their religious environments, including scriptures and notions of human perfectibility; but the common religious concepts and practices that pervaded each culture should not be understood as detracting from the creative fecundity of each figure’s thoughts. Instead, notions such as *apotheosis* or Christian perfectionism are taken to represent those values and qualities found in an atmosphere fertile enough to germinate the sorts of belief systems articulated by these two men and their respective communities. Believing that social heresy can draw out a profound attraction between opposed religious groups and deifying soteriologies, it is necessary to acknowledge the constellation of resources available to these movements as they participate in stability maintenance through the organisation and conveyance of their belief systems. In the following pages, these systems are analysed with a particular focus on their ability to resolve heresy, the third event of the process explicated in Chapter Two and a social task the necessity of which is poignantly captured by the emotional lines of a Mormon woman who witnessed the nineteenth-century sufferings of the Latter-day Saints:

Let us go, let us go where our rights are secure,  
Where the waters are clear and the atmosphere pure,  
Where the hand of oppression has never been felt,  
Where the blood of the Prophets has never been spilt.

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<sup>278</sup> Hansen, 41.

<sup>279</sup> Adler, 25.



Let us go, let us go where the kingdom of God  
Will be seen in its order extending abroad –  
Where the priesthood again will exhibit its worth  
In the regeneration of man and of earth.

Let us go, let us go to the far western shore,  
Where the blood-thirsty 'Christians' will hunt us no more;  
Where the waves of the ocean will echo the sound,  
And the shout of salvation extend the world round.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Eliza Snow, 'Let Us Go,' *Cultures in Conflict*, eds. John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), 310.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESOLVING HERESY: SOTERIOLOGICAL SCHEMAS

From the beginning, one of the primary objectives of this study has been to investigate the apparent elective affinity between religious groups suffering opposition and complex soteriologies that incorporate deification. In order to do so, we first borrowed the term heresy from the theological arena and redefined it as a threefold ideal type of religious opposition. As the principal outcome of Chapter One, this sociologically-informed redefinition of heresy paved the way for Chapter Three's analysis of the persecution and social rejection faced by early Christians and early Mormons which gave conceptual recognition to the heresiological idioms employed by the believers themselves. In Chapter Two, we presented a social process whereby religious groups experience such heresy and are forced to resolve the group instability that resulted from the conflict. Now, having already elucidated the specific forms of heresy encountered by our two representative parties, we outline the soteriological schemas prompted by the heresy. Although quite complex in terms of the theoretical notions required for their analysis (including anthropological, historical, eschatological, and teleological) these soteriological systems, nevertheless, are often articulated in a distinctive manner that goes some way in resolving the opposition experienced by the group.

The two major divisions that follow loosely correspond to the components of Mol's definition of religion, viz., sacralisation and identity. In 'Order and Salvation', the organisation and sacralising overtones of the belief systems receive due attention before turning to the roles and meaningful identities embedded within the soteriological schemas of individual members and their respective groups. In that which follows, then, one can rather easily identify the influence of Mol's fourfold model of sacralisation as well as the assumptions of the sociology of knowledge concerning social life as engendering and sustaining meaningful realities. More specifically, we corroborate Claude Lévi-Strauss' anthropological observation that 'mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 224.

Once again, Mol's ideas prove salient for our analysis; the dialectic between stability and adaptability lends two crucial categories to the study of doctrinal development. In a religious group's effort to resolve opposition, Mol's theory predicts a necessary balance between stable foci for religious identity and adaptable elements of the religious system. For Irenaeus and other Christians of the second century this is seen in the flexibility of an open canon alongside the persistent veneration of the Hebrew Scriptures, it is also evident in Irenaeus' insistence on the preservation of truth through the *regula fidei* exemplified in his argument over doctrinal variation concerning the date of Easter (Quartodeciman Controversy). The same equilibrium appeared in early Mormonism when, for example, The Book of Mormon received immediate and immutable canonisation but was soon complemented by the Book of Commandments which reflected the need for pragmatic instruction, capable of assisting Mormons in the unpredictable events of life. The publication of this perennially-open volume came just a year and a half after Smith founded his church. Along similar lines, the notion of continuing revelation functioned as an inbuilt check on extremes, insisting on interminable communication between God and the Latter-day Saints but prescribing guidelines for the receipt of such divine messages. For instance, Joseph Smith propagated the notion that all males were equally priests and prophets until Hiram Page claimed to receive supernatural revelations, then Smith came forward with two of his own providential pronouncements in which God unequivocally names Joseph as the only one authorised to convey divine message.<sup>2</sup> Future revelations were possible but also limited to Smith.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the large volume of extant documentation concerning the religious landscape of nineteenth-century America, the heretical process we outlined earlier appears more pronounced for early Mormonism than for early Christianity. This is not to claim that Irenaeus and his peers present a different social case; we confidently

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<sup>2</sup> BOC 30:2; 45:1-5

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1947), 364. This is a notable, and interesting, case of Weber's problem of the routinization of charisma. Charismatic authority, a trait Weber likely would have attributed to Smith, is necessarily ephemeral and, therefore, must progress toward more systematised and institutionalised forms of power if the group centred on the charismatic leader is to survive. In some ways, Weber's prediction parallels our broader concern with the process that leads toward more crystallised and articulated beliefs in the early stages of a religious movement.

assert that both are examples of the phenomenon. However, we can look to early Mormons for a more complete and compelling picture of the doctrinal consequences that emerge as a religious collective grapples with the dual needs of resolving heresy and sustaining the plausibility of the proffered solution.

The Mormons who were driven from the state of Missouri in 1839 did not lose faith in their leader or their religious community. LeSueur notes that they, instead, ‘believed that their troubles had been caused by dissenters and other enemies of God, and they accepted their plight as a scourge from the Lord to purify the Church and perfect the Saints.’<sup>4</sup> Yet, this outlook was an interpretation of agonistic experiences, an interpretation embraced as reality. Outside forces, however, repeatedly acted upon the early Latter-day Saints, causing the latter to absorb the blows as effectively as possible. The opposition that was intended by God to ‘perfect the saints’ in 1839 was viewed differently when it began in Missouri almost eight years earlier. Taysom shows how the concept of ‘gathering’ among Joseph Smith’s followers was altered over time, adapting to the undaunted aggression exerted by Mormonism’s opponents. In 1833, it was said that the LDS church existed to gather the elect in the city of Zion (Independence, Missouri), and believers were encouraged to dedicate themselves completely to this objective, facing death if it was required.<sup>5</sup> By 1834, Smith’s revelations concerning Zion and the gathering began to take a graver tone. Adherents were warned that failure to obey God’s commands would mean failure to establish Zion, Mormonism’s enemies would be victorious.<sup>6</sup> When creating a city of God in Missouri proved too difficult of a task, Smith revealed to his followers in 1844 that the true Zion ‘could be found wherever the pure in heart gathered.’<sup>7</sup> Taysom recognises this change as one example of a recurring pattern among early Mormons in which social pressures are accommodated and the group’s narrative is reformulated.

This pattern accords with ‘Mormonism’s capacity for adaptation’, a characteristic of the sect that Kendall White believes is demonstrated by the

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<sup>4</sup> LeSueur, 261.

<sup>5</sup> Taysom, ‘There is Always a Way of Escape,’ 186, 194.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 197.

‘theological innovations’ advanced by the group from 1835 to 1844.<sup>8</sup> White follows Alexander’s division of early Mormon theology into two periods: the essentially orthodox phase from 1830 to 1835 and the inventive phase from 1835 until Smith’s death in 1844.<sup>9</sup> The latter stage witnessed a number of important developments in LDS belief, but Alexander ultimately argues that the foundation for future Mormon theology was laid through the exposition of Smith’s revelations from 1832 until his death.<sup>10</sup> In Alexander’s view, three influences motivated the questions that these revelations were intended to answer. The second of these is the most important for our study, for it encapsulates our chief argument:

The second influence was the persecution of the Saints in Jackson County, Missouri. This persecution also intensified the emphasis on perfectionism – which eventually led to the doctrine of eternal progression. As the Saints suffered and persevered, the [LDS newspaper] *Evening and Morning Star* reemphasised the idea that the faithful could become Christlike, and a side of man’s nature quite apart from his fallen state was thus affirmed.<sup>11</sup>

In this way, opposition forced the Mormons to sculpt their existing, but inchoate, notions of chosenness into an unambiguous claim of eternal progress.

The explicit affirmation of such human potential was, however, the final articulation of a doctrine that had developed gradually for Smith. Alexander, and White after him, designate the years from 1835 to 1844 as the innovative phase because Smith began to emphasise unique beliefs such as ‘the finite nature of God, a more optimistic view of humanity, and a doctrine of salvation by merit.’<sup>12</sup> Also, after relocating to Nauvoo, Illinois in 1839, Joseph Smith began to stress the corporeality of the Godhead, reject the trinity, and teach that there were multiple gods.<sup>13</sup> In a revelation from 1843, Smith asserted that ‘when the Saviour shall appear...we shall see that he is a man like ourselves.’<sup>14</sup> The next month, the Mormon leader presented

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<sup>8</sup> O. Kendall White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), xv.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, 56-8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> White, xix; Alexander, 58.

<sup>13</sup> Boyd Kirkland, ‘The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God,’ *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 37.

<sup>14</sup> D&C 130:1

his followers with a new teaching concerning the nature of spirits: 'There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes.'<sup>15</sup> Thus, in two creative strokes, Smith expressed an idiosyncratic view of metaphysics in which everything is material, even God(s). The Nauvoo period also witnessed a change in Joseph Smith's understanding of the afterlife, an area of doctrine which serves as a convenient example of the development of soteriological thoughts over the course of Mormonism's first fourteen years.

In 1830, Smith offered his church a revelation concerning the *eschaton*. Echoing the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, he outlined the sequence of events that would signal the end of time. In doing so, Smith expressed a rather benign account of the dead receiving 'a crown of righteousness' and being raised up to 'be with' God.<sup>16</sup> Just two years later, the Mormon prophet introduced two 'priesthoods' to his church, levels of activity and commitment that were integral to the Mormon notion of restoration.<sup>17</sup> Those who received the priesthood were reminded that they would also receive all that the Father has, including the 'Father's kingdom'.<sup>18</sup> Another revelation from the same year offered a sort of revision of the 1830 prophecy concerning the end times. Here, the seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet and 'the saints shall be filled with his glory, and receive their inheritance and be made equal with [God]'.<sup>19</sup> This follows Smith's explication of three kingdoms of glory: the celestial, terrestrial, and telestial.<sup>20</sup> Another testament of developing concepts of the afterlife in 1832 is seen in section ninety-one of the 1835 edition of Doctrine and Covenants in which those who have the Melchizedek priesthood, and thus are expected to experience 'celestial glory', are said to be 'gods, even the sons of God: wherefore all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs, and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's; and they shall

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<sup>15</sup> D&C 131:2,7

<sup>16</sup> D&C 29:13

<sup>17</sup> As we will discuss below, Smith and his adherents grew bolder in their claims of restoring the truth and the related notion of direct ties to ancient Israel. Instituting the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods as graduated levels of knowledge and glory effectively rooted the system in a rich history whilst pushing present action to the fore.

<sup>18</sup> D&C1835 4:6

<sup>19</sup> D&C1835 7:33

<sup>20</sup> D&C1835 7:5

overcome all things.’<sup>21</sup> As Grant Underwood notes, these 1832 revelations concerning three levels of glory in the afterlife did not significantly impact Mormon beliefs for over a decade.<sup>22</sup>

However, Underwood undoubtedly has a specific 1843 teaching in mind. One of the most influential, and incendiary, of Smith’s revelations was presented to his followers just one year before his death. In promulgating a unique view of marriage in which man and wife remain ‘sealed’ for eternity and continue to produce ‘seeds forever and ever’, Joseph Smith asserted that those who participate in this ‘everlasting covenant’ are to be ‘gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.’<sup>23</sup> The revelation also promoted polygamy, a practice and a doctrinal principle that would prove contentious for many decades. It is enough, however, to note the transformation in thoughts represented by this prophetic statement. Those who, in 1830, simply expected to join God in heaven were, by 1843, capable of becoming ‘gods’ and received assurance that ‘all things are subject unto them.’ Theoretically speaking, the later notion should be understood as one outcome of early Mormonism’s struggle to avoid anomie when faced with persistent opposition. We agree with Alexander that it was external force that gradually brought deification to the fore in Smith’s mind. The disorder caused by physical hardships and the emotional chagrin resulting from interminable attacks on the credibility of Smith’s prophetic power caused a crescendo, nothing less than The King Follett Discourse.

At the 1844 funeral for King Follett, a revered member of the LDS community,<sup>24</sup> Smith elucidated the details of what had become an evolving and increasingly complex theological anthropology. Recognising the appropriateness of discussing eternal life at a funeral, the Mormon leader promised hope through knowledge:

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<sup>21</sup> D&C 1835 91:5-7; Psalms 82:6. Here, Smith is referencing Psalms 82: ‘I said, “you are gods; you are all sons of the Most High.”’ Western versions of deification typically find support by appealing to this verse. Irenaeus also cites the passage three times: *AH*, III.6.1; III.19.1; and IV.38.4. For an in-depth look at the development of deification in relation to the historical exegesis of Psalm 82:6, see Carl Mosser, ‘The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification,’ *JTS* 56(2005): 30-74.

<sup>22</sup> Grant Underwood, “‘Saved or Damned’: Tracing a Persistent Protestantism in Early Mormon Thought,” *BYU Studies* 25.3(1985): 95.

<sup>23</sup> D&C 132:19-20.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the life of King Follett, see: Joann Follett Mortensen, *The Man Behind the Discourse* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

The great majority of mankind do not comprehend anything, either that which is past, or that which is to come, as it respects their relationship to God...If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. I want to go back to the beginning, and so lift your minds into a more lofty sphere and a more exalted understanding...<sup>25</sup>

Temporarily disregarding the significant issues Smith raises, such as the place of time in LDS soteriology and what some might see as the nearly Feuerbachian philosophical notion that to know god is to know oneself, we take this moment simply to highlight the way in which Smith introduces concepts of deification in terms of higher forms of knowledge. He continued,

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man...We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil...he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did...and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves...the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead...<sup>26</sup>

Brodie notes that this sermon was the first instance in which the Mormon prophet proclaimed the ‘themes that he had been inculcating in fragments and frequently in secret to his most favoured saints.’<sup>27</sup> Indeed, just two months after the Kong Follett address, Smith gave another sermon in which he claimed to have always believed in a plurality of gods, asserting that the desire to clarify such teachings had been lingering for years.<sup>28</sup> Even so, Arnal’s conclusion, cited in Chapter One, that ‘heresy creates orthodoxy, by forcing the articulation of what had up to that point remained unnecessary to say’ seems quite apt when connected to the evolution of early Mormon theology.

The theological import of the funeral sermon in April 1844 cannot be gainsaid. As Van Hale concludes, it was the King Follett Discourse alone that cemented the doctrine of eternal progression as ‘eternal truth’, and it marked a transition for

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Smith, *King Follett Discourse* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2008), n.p.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Brodie, 366.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938), 370.



Mormon belief.<sup>29</sup> More importantly, there are fewer clearer examples of the social interplay between conflict and doctrine. If it is true that the resolution of heresy accompanies the reception and recognition of heresy, there is little surprise in the way that this influential sermon attempts to ameliorate various enduring struggles faced by the early Mormons. Throughout the homily, references are made to Smith's innocence and passive nature, his credibility as a prophet, the efficacy of baptism for the dead, and the just consequences awaiting apostates. One of the primary concerns, and an especially relevant topic for believers who lost property and relatives to the tragic violence of religious opposition, is the incessant external threat to the emotional and physical wellbeing of the Mormons. In a sense, the salvific progress that Smith articulates as a chance 'to advance in knowledge' was the capstone to that soteriological schema first initiated twelve years earlier when Mormons were promised a resurrection in which they would be 'made equal with God'. As the fermenting thoughts of the early Mormons and their leader interacted with agonistic forces and the perception of interminable religious persecution, pressure increased for elaborated soteriological beliefs capable of healing numerous social fissures. For Mormons as well as for second-century Christians, heresy was at least partially resolved by articulating relatively complex soteriological schemas. Before illuminating crucial components of Irenaeus' Economy of Salvation and Joseph Smith's Plan of Salvation, however, it is helpful to have a brief look at some examples of what is meant by resolution with regards to a belief system's direct effect on contextual tensions.

### **Toward Resolution**

There can be little doubt that one of Irenaeus' central concerns was the refutation of Valentinian 'Gnosticism'. Directed at this heterodox movement, *Against Heresies* often strives to counter the 'Gnostic' teachings point by point. In doing so, Irenaeus adopts a unifying tone.<sup>30</sup> For example, in response to his opponents' belief in a demiurge as well as their promulgation of a form of docetism, Irenaeus presents

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<sup>29</sup> Van Hale, 'The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse,' *BYU Studies* 18.2(1978): 10.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey Bingham, *Pocket History of the Church* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 42; John A. McGuckin, *The SCM Press A-Z of Patristic Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 185. Bingham and McGuckin both note that unity, harmony, and oneness are central to Irenaeus' work.

the belief that there is ‘one God the Father, and one Christ Jesus...’<sup>31</sup> Likewise, Irenaeus asserts that Jesus was a human ‘in every respect’. He also argued for agreement between the Hebrew Scriptures and the writings of the apostles as well as between the Eastern Church (he was born in Asia Minor) and the Western Church (he was bishop in Gaul). In addition to resolving these doctrinal debates on Christology, textual reception, and internal church tensions, the second-century bishop came to view human history as God’s ongoing creation of ‘one harmonious and consistent whole.’<sup>32</sup> This last statement is the most incisive for our analysis for in it, one encounters the notion of a soteriological schema as an overarching system of meaning that melds historical narrative, myth, participation, and group sentiments such as hope, justice, vindication, etc. In the following pages, references to the Economy of Salvation as a specific interpretive system derived from the words of Irenaeus point back to this passage from *Against Heresies*:

[God’s] wisdom is shown in His having made created things parts of *one harmonious and consistent whole*; and those things which, through His super-eminent kindness, receive growth and a long period of existence, do reflect the glory of the uncreated One...but by their continuing in being throughout a long course of ages, they shall receive a faculty of the Uncreated, through the gratuitous bestowal of eternal existence upon them by God...By this *arrangement*, therefore, and these *harmonies*, and a *sequence of this nature*, man, a created and organised being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God...(emphasis added)<sup>33</sup>

Recognising the social fragmentation and religious opposition knocking on his own nineteenth-century door, Joseph Smith involved his community in the enterprise of alleviating anomie. For some of Mormonism’s opponents, this was far from laudable. Perhaps the most intellectually sophisticated attack on early Mormonism was Alexander Campbell’s investigation of the Book of Mormon, *Delusions*. Whilst outlining the ‘internal evidence’ that suggests the Book of Mormon is a fraudulent and dubious text, Campbell observes that Joseph Smith’s new scripture settles ‘every error...discussed in New York for the last ten years.’ The Mormon leader ostensibly resolves,

infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church

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<sup>31</sup> AH, III.16.6

<sup>32</sup> AH, I.10.2; IV.38.3

<sup>33</sup> AH, IV.38.3

government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of freemasonry, republican government, and the rights of man.<sup>34</sup>

Although expressed in an accusatory tone, Campbell's argument draws warranted attention to early Mormonism as an identity-conferring system. Even in its first year of existence, the new religious movement offered its members stability by demonstrating inbuilt prowess with regards to doctrinal clarification. If Mol is correct to define identity as 'the stable niche that man occupies in a potentially chaotic environment', then Joseph Smith's new church was poised for social success from the outset, settling divisive religious debates mollified potential social conflicts in a milieu where the collective consciousness often entailed a wary bond of republicanism and Protestant Christianity and, consequently, offered a stable harbour for those seeking to escape the confusion.

While themes of unity in the face of division can be found in Joseph Smith's earliest revelations,<sup>35</sup> perhaps the most striking aspect of the religious movement lay in its conspicuous effort to indemnify its members against the prevalent unrest characterising America's religious environment. Givens alerts us to one paradoxical element of this phenomenon when he writes, 'Combining the restricted sacerdotalism of Roman Catholicism with the quasi universalism of Protestantism, Joseph forged a new version altogether.'<sup>36</sup> In a similarly useful comment, Bowman highlights the way in which the temple rituals introduced in Nauvoo, Illinois during the 1840s 'pressed back against the uncertainty, confused loyalty, and constant fear of disorder and death that had plagued the Mormons in general and Joseph Smith in particular since the founding of the church.'<sup>37</sup> However, the drive to resolve heresy extended beyond individual, circumscribed issues of belief and practice.

Although he acknowledges that Joseph Smith unified specific contentious topics of the day, such as the Mormon prophet's dissolution of a distinction between physical and spiritual, Philip Barlow illuminates the discernible *gestalt* found in

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon; With an Examination of its Internal and External Evidences, and Refutation of its Pretences to Divine Authority* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832), 13.

<sup>35</sup> BOC 40:22

<sup>36</sup> Givens, *People of Paradox*, 9.

<sup>37</sup> Bowman, 75.

Smith's 'actions, revelations, and words' that attempted to resolve the 'broken order' found in the American religious context by encouraging 'the Saints to live with one leg planted in the ordinary present, the other leg reaching beyond ordinary, sequenced time (what the Greeks called *chronos*) and into *kairos* (the opportune moment) and thence into divine *mythos*...' <sup>38</sup> Cognisant of the need for historical rootedness and familial ties in a young nation of immigrants enchanted by the siren calls of disestablishment, Smith ultimately posited an earthly 'Zion' which spiritualised the family unit, mandated baptism for the dead, and connected his followers to the ancient Israelites:

...the Mormon Prophet produced an overarching vision that reclaimed, extended, and redefined the meaning of family, that eventually changed the thrust of his religion...Grasping this [American] context, we can better appreciate the resonance of Smith's introduction of *patriarchs*, who in formal ordinances blessed faithful recipients, assigning each an ancient Israelite family lineage – assigned them, that is, a new identity...(original emphasis) <sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, Barlow notes that early Mormonism altered the notion of atonement as the work of Christ, instead defining the work of God as 'incorporating virtually all relations and spheres of activity in which humans had a part...' <sup>40</sup> In this way, both Irenaeus and Joseph Smith conceived of a soteriological schema encompassing past, present, and future. Irenaeus' 'consistent whole' and Smith's 'Zion' both extended salvation history into the future as one stretches a blanket over a sleeping body, and that resolving action at once ordered salvation and sacralised order.

### Order and Salvation

The developmental direction of soteriology toward notions of deification subsequent to the persecutions and conflicts outlined in the previous chapter is not surprising. In the middle of the second century, Justin already equated conversion to

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<sup>38</sup> Philip L. Barlow, 'To Mend a Fractured Reality: Joseph Smith's Project,' *Journal of Mormon History* 38.3 (2012): 35, 43, 44, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 38-9. For a sociologically-informed analysis of the blending of past, present, and future in early Mormon 'patriarchal blessings', the ceremonies in which believers are told of the ancient lineage to which they belong, see Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, 'The Doctrinal and Commitment Functions of Patriarchal Blessings in Early Mormon Development, 1834-45,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80.3(2012): 727.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 33.

Christianity with being perfected.<sup>41</sup> For those, like Irenaeus, who combined similar ideas with the immediate experience of overt opposition, it was perhaps nearly inevitable that they would espouse a sort of perfecting salvation process. In a sense, Henderson's argument for the validity of the comparative method when studying the historical development of heresy and orthodoxy is also germane for our sociologically-informed analysis of the same topic:

One might apply the neo-Darwinian idea of convergent evolution to illustrate the existence of these common points. Just as different biological lineages sometimes evolve similar adaptations to deal with common problems, such as the hexagonal patterns in the cells of honeycombs and in the interlocking plates of some turtles, so heresiographers in traditions as diverse as the early Christian and the Neo-Confucian developed similar antiheretical strategies to deal with common challenges that had only a few optimal solutions.<sup>42</sup>

If heresy and 'common challenges' are understood to be religious opposition, then the 'antiheretical strategies' employed by the second-century Christians and early Mormons represent efforts to construct an orderly system of beliefs in which conflict found resolution. It seems plausible that each of these groups arrived on the doorstep of deification because, in fact, there are a limited number of 'optimal solutions'. This concurs with our insistence that deification is not the only (or the necessary) response of all religious groups to overt opposition. Indeed, it would stretch the realm of analytical possibility to substantiate such a claim. It is possible, however, that young religious minorities tend to have few resolving options when faced with persecution and social marginalisation. It is not our concern, nor does space permit us, to speculate as to the blend of biological, psychological, social, geographical, and emotional factors that constrain a collective in the latter's reaction to social struggle. However, one should be mindful of the fact that a highly revered (but still open) corpus of texts sets a precedent for interpreting 'historical experience in cosmic terms', thus determining to some degree the manner by which Irenaeus and his fellow Christians made sense of the persecutions they witnessed.<sup>43</sup> Drawing on those increasingly authoritative materials as well as available cultural and philosophical

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<sup>41</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Henderson, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Castelli, 35; Bowersock, 5; and Dehandschutter, 15. Though their statements occur in admittedly disparate contexts, these three authors seem to agree that texts such as Paul, Mark, Luke-Acts, and Revelation all combined to establish an interpretive scheme in which martyrdom is absorbed into what Bowersock calls a 'conceptual system of posthumous recognition and anticipated reward...'

resources, the second-century Christians predated the Mormons in articulating a deifying soteriological system as the preferred expression of social orthodoxy in response to social heresy.

As a seminal component of the soteriological schemas developed by these groups, deification provided optimal explanatory efficacy whilst clearly positioning the group and its members within a meaningful system of action and reward. It settled the perceived disequilibrium between order and chaos, one of Mol's central arguments concerning the role of religion in society.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the soteriologies offered by Irenaeus and Joseph Smith reconciled their inherited paradigms, their contexts, and their unique experiences with social heresy. The magical worldview of the earliest Mormons and the supernaturalism of the Graeco-Roman world provided a suitable foundation for their developing soteriologies. For example, early Mormonism did not need to dissolve the boundary between the physical and the metaphysical, the magical perspective it had inherited had done much of the work already - although Smith certainly glossed the issue with an idiosyncratic view of the permanence of matter, in which the material world was spiritualised and the spiritual was materialised.<sup>45</sup> Yet, nineteenth-century primitivism was counteracted by an acknowledgement of the Enlightenment in the Mormon emphasis on knowledge and pragmatism, hallmarks of Smith's conception of progress and a topic explored later in the chapter.

Throughout the remainder of the present study, the soteriological schemas of Irenaeus and Joseph Smith are referred to, respectively as the Economy of Salvation (Economy) and the Plan of Salvation (Plan). Irenaeus repeatedly uses *οἰκονομία* ('economy') when discussing both the single, cohesive plan of salvation history as well as the various dispensations in which God interacts with humanity.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the notion of a specific 'Plan' of salvation emerges throughout Joseph Smith's

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<sup>44</sup> Mol, *The Faith of Australians*, 217

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Though not an exhaustive list, the following passages are important instances in which Irenaeus either depicts God as an architect (a nod to the economy as an 'arrangement') or references the economy of salvation directly: *Dem.*, 47 as well as *AH*, II.11.1; III.1.1; III.12.13; III.18.2; III.20.1; III.23.1; IV.14.2; IV.20.7; IV.33.1; IV.38.3; and V.31.1. It is also worth noting that Irenaeus' *oikonomia* utilises the same root (*nomos*) word for 'order' that we mentioned in Chapter Two as being important for a number of social-scientific terms – namely, Durkheim's *anomie*, Adler's *antinomian*, and Berger's use of *nomos* itself.

scriptural compositions – most notably in the Book of Mormon where it is variably cited as a ‘plan of redemption’, ‘plan of happiness’, ‘plan of mercy’, and the aforementioned ‘plan of salvation’.<sup>47</sup> As each of these expressions suggests, salvation is taken to be ordered and objective, acting on the believer and the collective with divine purpose. The ‘Economy’ and the ‘Plan’ thus offer phenomena apt for comparison in a study of this kind.

In Irenaeus, one encounters a sort of antecedent to that which was later designated *Heilgeschichte*, a ‘salvation history’ characterised by stages of development and revelation in God’s actions toward his creation. The Economy, for the second-century bishop, is God’s ordered arrangement for the ongoing process of creation. Though a thorough theological sketch of Irenaeus’ system would require more space than we are able to dedicate to the topic, it is important to acknowledge that numerous scholars of Irenaeus highlight the way in which his theology is more accurately an anthropology; refuting ‘Gnostic’ cosmology, with its postulation of the soul’s return to the Pleroma, Irenaeus outlined the Economy as material humanity’s path to God. Recalling the key passage (*AH*, IV.38.3) chosen earlier as representative of Irenaeus’ soteriological schema, it is seen that human history is salvation history is creation history.<sup>48</sup> This leads Julie Canlis to define the Economy in Irenaeus as ‘God continuing in his ongoing creation of humanity’ so that humanity may receive glory.<sup>49</sup> This glory, for Irenaeus, is the ‘likeness’ that was lost when the first man of Genesis ate the forbidden fruit. As is elucidated below, image (*imago dei*) and likeness perform integral functions within the Economy as the believer requires grace through the Spirit in order to progress from being in the image to being in the likeness, a possibility resulting from Christ’s incarnation. Due to this articulation of the

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<sup>47</sup> See: Alma 12:25, 26, 30-3; 34:9, 16; 42:5, 8, 11, 15; 2 Nephi 9:6, 13; Jarom 1:2; and Jacob 6:8.

<sup>48</sup> For more on Irenaeus’ theological anthropology, see John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Julie Canlis, ‘Being Made Human: The Significance of Creation for Irenaeus’ Doctrine of Participation,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58.4(2005): 434-54; Timothy Milton Endean, *The Doctrine of Creation as a Unifying Theme in the Theology of Irenaeus*, Ph.D. diss. (Saint Louis University, 1987); John Kaufman, *Becoming Divine, Becoming Human: Deification Themes in Irenaeus of Lyons*, Ph.D. diss. (MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2009); Denis Minns, *Irenaeus* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 56-82; Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 51-94; M.C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishing, 2008) and *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York: T&T Clark / Continuum, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Canlis, 443; *AH*, IV.11.1-2; V.35.2

soteriological system, Ysabel de Andia understands Irenaeus' Economy to be 'both the overall plan of salvation history and the dispensation of the grace of God, by ministry of the Word...'<sup>50</sup> The result bears notable resemblance to theologian John Drane's summary of the non-proselytism variety of Christianity, one of two 'understandings of the relationship between Christian faith and culture':

[It] is a positive view of human nature, seeing people as 'made in God's image' (Genesis 1:26-27), and therefore having inbuilt potential to be something more than they now are in an ongoing process of change ('conversion') as the message of Jesus is taken seriously and acculturated in relation to different social circumstances.<sup>51</sup>

Drane's words are appropriate for our discussion of the Economy because he highlights both the causal relationship between an emphasis on the *imago dei* and a positive view of humanity's potential to progress, as well as the notion that such progress occurs as faith interacts with diverse social situations. It is also intriguing that Drane uses the term 'conversion' to describe this process of change over time, a faint echo of Mol's belief that conversion is the stripping of an old identity and the welding of a new identity in its place or 'a break between the past and the present' as the old ways appear less and less adequate for interpreting experience.<sup>52</sup> Born of the dialectic between belief and circumstance, then, soteriological schemas such as Irenaeus' Economy abet social order by establishing a structure within which instability and change find purpose.

In early Mormonism, the picture is much the same, and the consequent Plan of Salvation came to be the 'essential scheme of the "gospel"'.<sup>53</sup> As the outcome of prophetic pronouncements and the martyrdom mentality adumbrated previously, Joseph Smith's Plan is a dynamic combination, and ritualised expression, of cosmic narrative and moral pragmatism. Consisting of natural laws and historical epochs, the Plan describes both the divinely-sanctioned system of redemption through the work of Jesus Christ as well as the process of obedience in which believers must demonstrate

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<sup>50</sup> Ysabel de Andia, *Homo vivens: incorruptibilité et divinisation de l'homme selon Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986), 60.

<sup>51</sup> John Drane, 'From Creeds to Burgers: Religious Control, Spiritual Search, and the Future of the World,' *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, eds. James A. Beckford and John Walliss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 128.

<sup>52</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 51.

<sup>53</sup> Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition*, 8.



their commitment in order to eternally progress. This latter element is of primary importance as the laws, or ordinances, necessary for progression are considered eternal and cosmic, stretching from before the creation of the world into the endless future and applicable to God himself. Thus, two parallel definitions of the Plan appear in Bruce McConkie's widely read work on Mormon beliefs: 1) '...all of the laws, ordinances, and performances by conformity to which mortal man is empowered to gain eternal life in the kingdom of God', and 2) '...all of the laws, ordinances, principles, and doctrines by conformity to which the spirit offspring of God have power to progress to the high state of exaltation enjoyed by the Father.'<sup>54</sup> The subtle differences between the two definitions are intended to signal the way in which the Plan is both the 'gospel' of Jesus Christ in which humans are granted salvation from death as well as the grander scheme permitting pre-existent souls to experience a mortal life and continue to gain knowledge in the afterlife until those who are fully exalted attain godhood.<sup>55</sup> As salvation history, the schema represents this process of eternal progress as movement 'from the pre-existence, through obedience in this life into the post-mortal life' (see fig. 1).<sup>56</sup> In an almost Platonic stroke, the Plan entails a pre-existence in which 'intelligences' endure a spiritual birth, learn necessary truths prior to their mortal birth on earth, and are eventually rewarded with the commensurate level of glory in the afterlife (Celestial, Terrestrial, Telestial).

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<sup>54</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 575, 576.

<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that salvation, in the LDS sense, refers more to a universal phenomenon by which all of humanity will be spared death and receive at least the lowest (Telestial) level of glory. The notable exception is that element of humanity that has known the truth but rejected it: viz., dissenters.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 81.

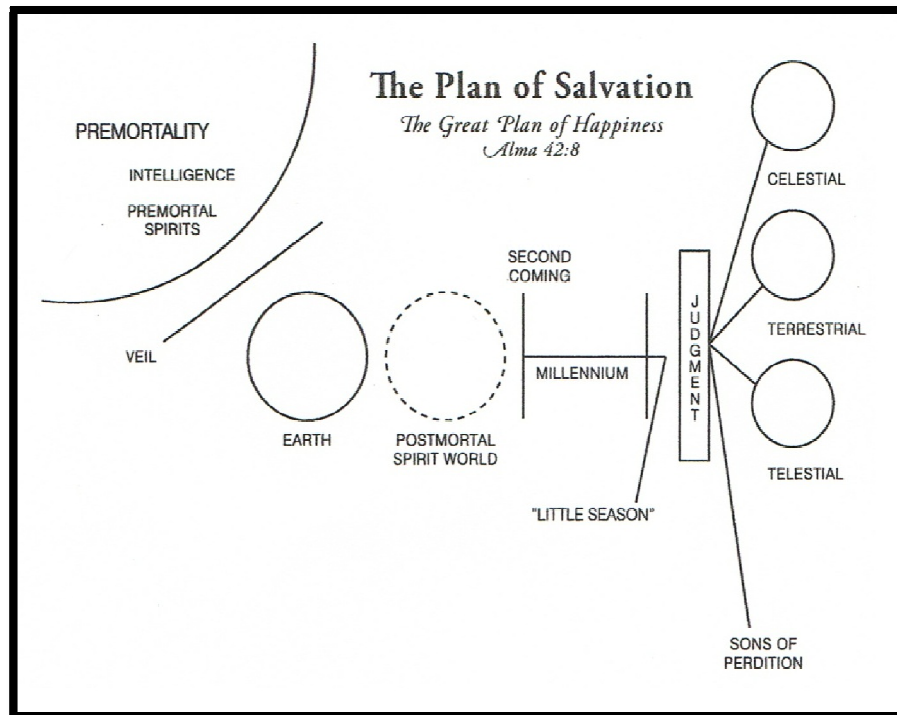


Figure 1. The LDS Plan of Salvation.

Source: Diagram from David J. Ridges, *Doctrinal Details of the Plan of Salvation* (Springville: Cedar Fort, Inc., 2005), 1.

As in the case of Irenaean anthropology, the philosophical and theological foundations of the Mormon salvation schema deserve greater attention than is possible in our sociologically-oriented analysis.<sup>57</sup> However, it is patently important that the belief system intimated above reflects a slightly later synthesis of the fragmentary concepts offered by Joseph Smith during his leadership of the LDS church. He presented a more systematic understanding of salvation in the final months of his life, but those radical declarations required further organisation. Whilst one historian claims that ‘the logic of [Joseph Smith’s] mythology and theology...satisfied the inbred desire of Yorkers to achieve an orderly, intellectual formulation of their beliefs’, it is perhaps even more evident that the pragmatism built into the movement from the outset appealed to the itinerant, semi-literate Americans who first joined the ranks of early Mormonism. The Book of Mormon linked the Plan

<sup>57</sup> For more on this, see Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965). Blake Ostler’s multi-volume set is perhaps the most detailed analysis of Mormon theology to date: Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001); *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism and the Love of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006); and *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008).

with a ‘probationary time’ during which humanity must repent of the sin of Adam and Eve, serving God after having incurred the just consequence of original sin.<sup>58</sup> Had the first humans skirted this responsibility, the Plan would have been thwarted. In the early 1840s, of course, Smith expanded this notion, adding both the concept of deification officially introduced in the King Follett Discourse as well as the detailed account of the pre-existence included in the Book of Abraham. The latter, presented by Smith as his own translation of a papyrus fragment, supplemented the earlier 1830/31 Book of Moses (Smith’s addendum to the Old Testament) by enlarging the account of pre-mortality during which a plan is formed among the Gods for the creation of the world, the Father chooses to send Jesus as part of this plan, and Satan is expelled from heaven.<sup>59</sup>

In the Book of Moses, Satan conspires to destroy the agency of humanity, and the Book of Abraham explicitly incorporates obedience and reward into the overarching Plan. Recalling the specific frustrations encountered by the Mormons as they physically and ideologically battled a burgeoning American religious orientation in the form of Evangelical Protestantism whilst internal dissension tugged at the seams of LDS solidarity, it seems quite revealing that Smith’s teachings gradually culminated in a soteriological schema that emphasised the present (morality and submission) in addition to the past (pre-mortal council of the Gods) and the future (deification). In the name of disestablishment and democracy, eighteenth-century America removed many of society’s ties to history or tradition. In a sense, Mormon social subversion in the early nineteenth century is apparent in the group’s insistence on historical rootedness, only conceding that there was a temporary break in the continuity of time within the Plan, a rift that Smith repaired by restoring the gospel. In comparison, and germane for the present analysis, Irenaeus charged his ‘Gnostic’ opponents with subverting social norms in their own way. The Graeco-Roman milieu defined religious legitimacy as possession of a demonstrable history. By positing the existence of pneumatics, an elite category of humans who alone possess true *gnosis* (spiritual knowledge), the Valentinians avoided the need for tradition or history altogether. In response, Irenaeus asserted that the truly ‘spiritual’ individual is someone who has ‘received the Spirit of God which was with men from the beginning

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<sup>58</sup> Alma 42:4-5

<sup>59</sup> Moses 4:1-4; Abraham 3:24-27; 4

in all the “economies” of God and predicted the future, showed for the present, and told about the past...’<sup>60</sup> By highlighting the activity of God in the past and discussing past, present, and future in terms of God’s ‘economies’, Irenaeus simultaneously answered the Roman cry for credibility and put forth the belief that God’s involvement with the world is as orderly as it is all-encompassing. Thus, the soteriological schemas of both Irenaeus and Joseph Smith charted time and activity (God’s *and* humanity’s) in terms of past, present, and future. Utilising these three divisions in the following examination of both systems allows us to remain attuned to the ways in which these opposed groups integrated their social struggles with their soteriologies.

## **Past**

Sociologists and historians are, of course, aware of the role(s) played by history within the teachings and practices of religious communities. As was mentioned in Chapter Two, Berger views religious rituals as the preservation of historical events that were perceived as divine intervention. By offering present and future generations of adherents the chance to engage with these past events, ritual provides continuity. This relates to discussions of collective memory such as Castelli’s study of martyrdom. Sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger joins the conversation in her more recent theoretical study of religion, beginning her analysis with the premise that religions are identifiable as such by their ability to situate believers and communities in a shared history or lineage.<sup>61</sup> She claims that, for the world’s major faith traditions, this trait has been lost over time and accounts for the decline of those religions as they progressively come up short in this social function. Hervieu-Léger’s observation is instructive in at least one regard – namely, that one of the seminal functions of religion appears to be its provision of a poignant and robust historical identity for members individually and the group as a collective. To this incisive thought, one might add that the historical identity conferred on the believers is just one of the various soteriological components the existence of which is owed to the interaction of societal pressures and doctrinal evolution.

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<sup>60</sup> *AH*, IV.33.1

<sup>61</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 125, 127.

In the late first and early second centuries, both Jews and Christians saw themselves as the true Israel, God's chosen people.<sup>62</sup> Later, Celsus aimed his polemical artillery at this very claim, denying the alleged Jewish roots of the emerging Christian community. His criticism was particularly powerful because of the new movement's desire for credibility. Consequently, this tension founds its way into soteriological ideas such as those promulgated by Irenaeus. In refuting the 'Gnostic' assertion that the Hebrew God was the Demiurge, a separate and naively malevolent deity from the great Bythos to whom those with *gnosis* will return, Irenaeus also established a historical connection for his fellow believers. The Jewish God was the one and only deity, the very same force that created the world and sent Christ (the long-awaited Jewish Messiah).<sup>63</sup> Stressing a motif of unity, Irenaeus linked the untested Christian present with the more acceptable Jewish past. The resulting identity was a complex amalgam of Jewish distinction and a brand new Christian self-definition. Although, as we stated in the previous chapter, Christians were beginning to exist as a monolithic movement, the heresy they faced from society prevented any total abrogation of their Jewish heritage.

The construction of Christian identity, however, benefited from more than an appeal to Jewish roots. In both *Demonstration* and *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus adumbrates a narrative theology in which the creation of Adam serves as the first link in a soteriological chain. Recall the key passage from the fourth book of *Against Heresies* with which we began this study of salvation and order. There, Irenaeus refers to humanity as having been 'rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God'. In creating Adam, God essentially formed infantile, imperfect beings incapable of possessing perfection. Irenaeus repeatedly asserts that Adam sinned because of his ontological state of having been created; only that which is uncreated (God) is truly perfect.<sup>64</sup> The first human, then, is described as 'innocent and childlike', 'very little', 'an infant', and a 'young child'.<sup>65</sup> Expressing an idiosyncratic understanding of the Genesis account, Irenaeus suggests that original sin was not the

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<sup>62</sup> Lightfoot, 7.

<sup>63</sup> *Dem.*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> *AH*, IV.11.1-2

<sup>65</sup> *Dem.*, 11-17, 22, 32, 47, 48.

rebellious act of power-hungry humans but the nearly inevitable transgression of an immature creation for, as he states, ‘we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods.’<sup>66</sup>

Osborn summarises the way in which this view of humanity’s origins informs the entire soteriological schema: ‘...The words “let us make man in our image and likeness” extend beyond creation to the whole divine economy, which ends when mankind progresses from the kingdom of the son to the transforming vision of the father.’<sup>67</sup> The Economy is a complex, but consistent, plan for Irenaeus. Losing the likeness of God when their immaturity led them to sin, Adam and Eve stand as the first representatives of humanity, a lineage requiring redemption so that the Economy proceeds ‘according to the good pleasure of the Father’.<sup>68</sup> In elucidating this history, Irenaeus makes room for the existence of persecution, locating the genesis of opposition in the antagonism exhibited between Cain and Abel, the second generation of humanity.<sup>69</sup> Redemption, however, is offered through the recapitulative work of Christ which ‘does not bring human beings immediately to a state of perfection but recovers for them the capacity to grow into it.’<sup>70</sup> Recapitulation, in the Irenaeian sense, refers to the way in which Jesus Christ (the archetype of the *imago dei*) is a second Adam, fulfilling those aspects of the Economy that Adam could not.<sup>71</sup> Organising the narrative in this way, Irenaeus moved effortlessly from history to individual impetus as he enticed others with a prehistoric identity only available to those who accept Jesus as the restorer of progress.

Combating the exclusivity of the Valentinians, Irenaeus taught his own form of unique identity – albeit, an identity that he believed to be available to everyone in

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<sup>66</sup> *AH*, IV.38.4

<sup>67</sup> Osborn, 214.

<sup>68</sup> *AH*, III.23.1

<sup>69</sup> *Dem.*, 17; *HC*, 2.13. It is worth noting that Oliver Cowdery, an important early Mormon figure, also located the origins of religious opposition in the story of Abel. In Joseph Smith’s *History of the Church*, Cowdery is recorded: ‘The lives of those who proclaim the true Gospel will be in danger; this has been the case ever since the days of righteous Abel. The same opposition has been manifest whenever man came forward to publish the Gospel.’

<sup>70</sup> Jeff Vogel, ‘The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation: An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption,’ *Anglican Theological Review* 89.3(2007): 455.

<sup>71</sup> *Dem.*, 32.

equal measure. Joseph Smith, however, went even further to establish an essential link to history that was effective for defying the unanchored ethos of the time whilst fortifying the in-group identity of his followers. In one sense, Smith was not alone. Davis mentions that ‘no theme is so evident in the Jacksonian era as the strained attempt to provide America with a glorious heritage and a noble destiny.’<sup>72</sup> Various groups purported to be a ‘restoration’ of one kind or another. Alexander Campbell’s disciples, for instance, wanted to return to the practices and approaches that they believed were the defining characteristics of the earliest Christian communities. As was discussed previously, many Americans began to envision a sacred future for their nation. The need for heritage, however, was a difficult challenge in such a young country founded on principles of democracy and anti-authoritarian ideals. Indeed, the relationship between authority and history became increasingly obvious; when every voice is equal and all lack the timbre of aged wisdom, reliability is difficult to discern.

Of course, for those same Jacksonians, no voice was more credible than God’s. Yet, in positing innumerable gods and innumerable worlds, Joseph Smith eventually located and spotlighted the one immutable, indomitable source of truth that surpassed even the words of God, a spring of eternal knowledge that bowed to the rationalistic tendencies of post-Enlightenment America just as impeccably as it mollified the desultory lives of New England’s itinerant farmers: cosmological law. Preferring to discuss these laws in terms of ‘principles’ of the gospel, Smith slowly sculpted his soteriological ideas in such a way that the notion of principles governing not only creation but God as well was really the culmination of many other teachings. In his King Follett sermon, the Mormon leader pointed to the act of climbing a ladder as a fitting analogy for his brand of deification. He claimed that God was once a man and had already climbed this ‘ladder’ of exaltation, progressing from one level to the next. By explicitly stating the manner in which ‘all gods’ have progressed, and combining that notion with the metaphysical assertion that ‘intelligences’ (the pure matter cloaked with spirits in the pre-existence)<sup>73</sup> have always existed alongside God, Joseph Smith instituted a meaningful belief system built on a cosmological formula.

Perhaps this was the natural climax to a movement that began with the publication of a voluminous work of sacred scripture purportedly translated from

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<sup>72</sup> Davis, 209.

<sup>73</sup> D&C1835 82:5

historic tablets, telling the story of lost tribes from ancient Israel, and somewhat ostentatiously declaring itself a supplement to the Bible. Without question, time only served to expand the historical identity first disclosed in the pages of the Book of Mormon. As Bushman notes, Smith's 1832 revelations concerning LDS priesthood 'linked modern priests to Moses, the patriarchs, and Adam as much as to God.'<sup>74</sup> The Mormon priesthood 'made the Saints "sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham," part of an ancient family of priests...[Thus] the Saints had an instant history.'<sup>75</sup> Chapter Three included the early Mormon's provocative use of 'gentile' for those outside of the LDS community. As was noted at that point in our study, using this term for outsiders was less about attempting to rewrite history and more about self-definition. Ordained as priests in the same manner as Aaron, possessing the Book of Mormon, and uniquely chosen to restore the gospel, early Mormons looked to the potent past of Israel for identity in the unsteady context of nineteenth-century America.<sup>76</sup>

As early Mormon soteriology evolved, narrative joined with ritual to sustain identity and explain heresy. Again, Mol's model of sacralisation as the combined product of objectification, commitment, ritual, and myth seems uniquely applicable to the early Mormon case. The objectified narrative, or myth, not only provided a stable self-understanding but also neutralised potentially destabilising forces confronted by the group by giving an account of the origins of those forces. For example, in addition to the aforementioned passage from the Book of Moses in which Satan is set up as humanity's ultimate nemesis,<sup>77</sup> other scriptural texts described the creation of the world as well as elaborated on the existing dualism between Satan and righteous believers.<sup>78</sup> In some cases, there is an almost transparent link between persecution and Smith's eagerness to anchor his system to a cosmological timeline *par excellence*.

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<sup>74</sup> Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 203.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.; D&C1835 3:18-27; 4:2,6

<sup>76</sup> Faulring, 69. On at least one occasion, Joseph Smith appears to appeal to the martyrs of Christian history for comfort and identity. After being scoffed at by a group of men passing him on the street, Smith wrote in his personal diary on the night of 2 December 1835, 'We are led to mingle our prayers with those Saints that have suffered the like treatment before us. Whose souls are under the altar crying to the Lord for veng[e]ance upon those that dwell upon the earth.'

<sup>77</sup> Moses 4:1-4

<sup>78</sup> E.g., BOC 64:29 and Abraham 4



For instance, locked in a Missouri jail in 1839 and aware of the violent expulsion of his followers from that state, Smith composed a letter betraying both his incensed mood concerning the aggressive opposition he faced as well as his confidence in the faith-building power of time. Encouraging his fellow believers, he wrote,

God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now; Which our forefathers have awaited with anxious expectation to be revealed in the last times...A time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be manifest. All thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ...*According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was...*(emphasis added)<sup>79</sup>

Shortly after these words were written, Mormonism entered the Nauvoo period, a time of heightened theological creativity. Instituting temple rituals such as marriage sealing, the endowment ceremony, and baptism for the dead, Joseph Smith rounded out the sacralisation process by involving Mormon identity in somatic activity. Once again, history played a significant role in each ritual. The endowment ceremony, for instance, served as an opportunity to learn eternal ‘signs and tokens’ originally introduced to Adam and necessary for entrance into the celestial realm of the afterlife.

Baptism for the dead became increasingly important as well and highlights the way in which early Mormonism appealed to past, present, and future for the resolution of heresy. Those who died in the past could be baptised by proxy in the present so that they might receive exaltation in the future. The centrality of this ritual belief leads Davies to construct the concept of ‘soteriological lineage’ in order to analyse Mormon understandings of salvation.<sup>80</sup> Davies, of course, is focused on Mormonism at the turn of the twenty-first century, yet his illumination of Mormon salvation as a sort of ‘family tree’ in which believers are encouraged to perform baptisms for their ancestors as a way of earning exaltation for both themselves and those who have already died is valuable for our investigation of early Mormon beliefs. Faced with hostility, death, and dissension, Joseph Smith articulated a schema in

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<sup>79</sup> D&C 121:26-32

<sup>80</sup> Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 143, 146-8. Davies describes the ‘soteriological lineage’ as an ‘extended family’ in which Mormon identity is strengthened by assuming an active role in the salvation of ancestors. This is particularly important given Mormonism’s emphasis on family and marriage as eternal institutions, procreation being a sort of reward and hallmark of celestial glory.

which historically-rooted distinctiveness was bolstered by obedience and performance as well as solidarity-boosting notions of kinship. Deifying progression was thought to be possible only by combining the actions of Adam and Eve in the past with commitment in the present.<sup>81</sup> We now turn to the latter, exploring the ways by which Irenaeus and Joseph Smith made sense of the heresy they faced in the present. Connections to the past supplied early Christians and early Mormons with a much-needed foundation, but the personal heresy faced by each of these nascent movements necessitated a more complete worldview in which perseverance and justice were commended and the physical world received due attention.

## Present

It has already been observed that, for Joseph Smith and his followers, the material world was spiritualised and the spiritual was materialised.<sup>82</sup> In Givens' terms, Mormons tend to 'sacralise the everyday'.<sup>83</sup> Viewing this tension between the material and the spiritual as one paradox among many in Mormon theology and philosophy, Givens emphasises the challenges faced by Mormons in the twentieth century as a result of the group's struggle to possess and balance opposing categories. Ephraim Ericksen, a Mormon philosopher, ultimately concurs: 'The tension between these two principles (the prophetic and the priestly), the dynamic and the conservative, the inspiration toward the new and the stabilising and the authoritative power of the old, constitutes the problem of twentieth century Mormonism.'<sup>84</sup> Yet, the early Mormons of the nineteenth century successfully embraced the tension between a spiritual realm in which 'all spirit is matter' and a mortal life in which 'all those who will not endure chastening...cannot be sanctified.'<sup>85</sup> Six years after presenting the latter revelation, Joseph Smith reiterated the notion that God allows

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<sup>81</sup> Davies, *Meaning and Salvation*, 149.

<sup>82</sup> Also see Fleming, 141. Fleming asserts that 'Mormonism offered to immerse its followers in a worldview that infused the divine into even the most desperate facets of the human condition.'

<sup>83</sup> Givens, *People of Paradox*, 42.

<sup>84</sup> E.E. Ericksen, 'Priesthood and Philosophy,' *Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters: Proceedings* 34(1957): 14.

<sup>85</sup> D&C 131:7; D&C1835 97:2

suffering as a trial of faith. Detained in a small jail cell, Smith recorded the voice of God as the prophet heard it:

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to compelling imagery, the revelation included a reinforcing acknowledgement of the beneficial role of opposition for those who endure in faith. Just as he had done before in his ‘Lectures of Faith’, Smith’s Plan formed a direct connection between suffering and obedience on the one hand and progress on the other.

For Irenaeus, too, the logic of the Economy extends to the social heresy faced by the faithful. Explicating his chiliastic eschatology, the Christian bishop underscores the function of earthly hardships in delineating righteous and wicked: ‘...Tribulation is necessary for those who are saved, that having been after a manner broken up, and rendered fine, and sprinkled over by the patience of the Word of God, and set on fire, they may be fitted for the royal banquet.’<sup>87</sup> As indicated in the preceding chapter, the persecution of Christians came to be interpreted by believers as opportunities to progress, the chance to shoulder the mantle of martyrdom. Familiar with the brutality of such spectacles as well as with ‘Gnostic’ denigration of the material, or physical body, Irenaeus not only highlights the importance of obedient suffering but of suffering in the flesh. He taught that the ‘glory of man’ was ‘to continue and remain in the service of God’ but supplemented this imperative with a focus on Christ’s incarnation and recapitulation as the true *theanthropos* whose own obedient suffering restored humanity’s present advancement toward the ‘royal banquet’.<sup>88</sup> Accordingly, the ‘glory of God is the living man’ for, as Osborn succinctly states, ‘participation is needed because human response is part of [the]

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<sup>86</sup> D&C 122:7

<sup>87</sup> AH, V.28.2

<sup>88</sup> AH, IV.14.1

economy...'<sup>89</sup> Yet, Irenaeus should not be misunderstood as claiming that humanity is the only active agent in the salvation process. In fact, his discussion of humanity's service to God clearly stresses the way in which such service is done in reciprocity for God's continuous bestowal of grace and incorruptibility through his two 'hands', the Word and the Spirit.<sup>90</sup> As a chance to obey and serve, therefore, the earthly life of the believer is an indispensable component of the soteriological schema for both Irenaeus and Joseph Smith. As a mortal created in the image of God, one must display patient commitment in the face of opposition in order to advance in knowledge and spiritual standing.

#### *Mortality, Materiality (salus carnis)*

Though the significance of the human body and its corresponding mortal life is conveyed slightly differently by Irenaeus and Joseph Smith, pride of place is given to the *imago dei* in each of their systems, a notable illustration of each figure's aptitude in adapting existing theological categories and textual interpretations to suit the immediate demands of agonistic experiences. Irenaeus, for instance, intimates the anthropological component of his Economy in response to an overtly hostile 'Gnostic' belief. Voicing a distinct vituperation of the material world, Irenaeus' Valentinian opponents not only denied the Incarnation but threatened to invalidate martyrdom. For these 'Gnostics', matter was thought to be the evil creation of a despotic but powerless Demiurge; salvation was escape from one's physical body. By implication, then, Valentinian dualism between spirit and matter seemingly robbed the persecutions suffered by second-century Christians of their power by removing spiritual significance from the physical bodies that were harmed. Against this thought, and perfectly demonstrating the overlap between doctrinal and personal forms of heresy, Irenaeus insists that the recapitulative work of Jesus Christ was effective precisely because the Son experienced all stages of life in the complete form and nature of a human.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps it seems counterintuitive to include Irenaeus' view of the salvation of the flesh (*salus carnis*) in a discussion of the role of the present within the Economy

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<sup>89</sup> *AH*, IV.20.7; Osborn, 21.

<sup>90</sup> *Dem.*, 5; *AH*, II.30.9; IV.14; IV.20; V.6.1; de Andia, 64-7.

<sup>91</sup> *AH*, IV.38.1-2

for after all, his insistence that humanity's physical nature will receive redemption comes as the bishop elucidates his eschatological thoughts and offers the future hope of renewed bodies. However, the expectation of renewed bodies is poignant because the future promise points back to a life lived in righteous obedience. Later, our focus turns to the topics of the conquest of death as well as the individual's identity as an active self, operating within the overarching, meaning-conferring schema. Currently focusing on the importance of the present, however, it is vital to note that Irenaeus explicitly connects the salvation of the flesh to experiences of opposition as seminal events and beliefs contained by the Economy:

...some who are reckoned among the orthodox go beyond *the pre-arranged plan for the exaltation of the just*, and are ignorant of *the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption*, they thus entertain heretical opinions. For the heretics, *despising the handiwork of God, and not admitting the salvation of the flesh...disallow a resurrection affecting the whole man...how can they be wondered at, if again they know nothing as to the plan of the resurrection?* (emphasis added)<sup>92</sup>

Supplementing these comments in the very next chapter, Irenaeus rebukes the 'Gnostics' for being ignorant of 'God's dispensations, and of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and *of the earthly kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption, by means of which...[the] worthy are accustomed gradually to partake of the divine nature.* (emphasis added)'<sup>93</sup> Going even further, he argues that there is logic to the schema by which the bodies that were 'afflicted...being proved in every way by suffering' should be the same bodies in which those martyred are revived prior to the final judgment.<sup>94</sup> It is, of course, noteworthy that Irenaeus repeatedly attaches suffering and worthiness to the bodily resurrection of believers, doing so actually shifts the focus from the future to the present as the domain of action and efficacy. In the present, one must demonstrate faith and subservience. In the present, one is persecuted and 'disciplined for incorruption'. To operate under this scheme is, for Irenaeus, to participate in God's arrangement for salvation.<sup>95</sup> Future hope is accorded its motivating place, but the identity derived from historical continuity is

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<sup>92</sup> AH, V.31.1

<sup>93</sup> AH, V.32.1

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> AH, V.14.4

fortified by manifest, material meaning in the here and now, a mechanism of resolution particularly well-suited for those facing death at the hands of social competitors.

As an example of such a persecuted group, it is not surprising that the early Mormons eventually integrated physical, mortal life into their schema as well. As his community journeyed from state to state, facing hostility and violent rejection of one degree or another in each location, Joseph Smith's teachings on the *imago dei* evolved. In the mid-1830s, the Mormon leader stated that the Father was a 'personage of spirit, glory, and power' and added that Jesus was 'made or fashioned like unto man.'<sup>96</sup> A few lines later, Smith said that those who obey God's commands will become 'joint heirs with Jesus Christ', thus 'transformed into the same image or likeness'.<sup>97</sup> Yet, as Hale notes, the doctrine changed by 1843, supplanted by the emerging notion of eternal progression.<sup>98</sup> That year, Smith recorded a revelation explicitly affirming the corporeality of the Father and the Son.<sup>99</sup> The Father was no longer a 'personage of spirit', and transformation into the divine image was no longer relegated to the future.

Smith closed the distance, temporally and ontologically, between past and future. The God who created the world was an exalted man, and the humans who populated that world shared the physicality of God. Addressing Mormon spirituality in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Davies offers an insightful expression of this dual proximity to the divine which is just as valid for understanding early Mormon doctrine as it blossomed in the 1840s:

To speak of God's body is not just some metaphorical reference for Latter-day Saints but is an expression of the profoundest symbolic expression of Mormon spirituality, for in it the Saint acknowledges a likeness with God, a likeness that is rooted in their ultimate kinship and speaks of the possibility of what lies open to one's own destiny.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> D&C1835 Lecture 5:2

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Hale, 8.

<sup>99</sup> D&C 130:22

<sup>100</sup> Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 75.

In this way, Smith's Plan of Salvation extended beyond historical narrative and future reward. The present life was where the two touched ends, a crucial episode in which the human figure seized the chance to learn from experience and almost literally walk in the footsteps of God along the path of exaltation.

### *Participation and Expectation*

The actions and choices made during one's life, however, were expected to aid the process of salvation for both Irenaeus and Joseph Smith. A willingness to die was not the only form of patient obedience effective within the schema. In fact, the free agency of humanity was central for each of the soteriological schemas. Justin set a precedent by asserting, in response to persecution at the hands of unjust leaders, 'Indeed, every creature is capable, by nature, of vice and of virtue. Nor would any action of theirs be worthy of praise unless they had the power to incline to either.'<sup>101</sup> For Justin, such power was slowly and partially acquired in this life. Likewise, Irenaeus relates free will and the ability to choose good to humanity's gradual possession of the 'likeness' of God.<sup>102</sup> He explains that individuals possess knowledge of good and evil, the former consisting of obedience to God and the latter consisting of disobedience to God. Through experience and discipline, the mind learns to preserve what is good, with the desirable consequence of becoming 'a perfect work of God.'<sup>103</sup> In Irenaeus' view, then, 'image and likeness' = free will = participation (faith and obedience).

This active involvement of the individual in the Economy strikes a direct blow to the 'Gnostic' system Irenaeus contests, wherein only those void of true *gnosis* are required to employ good works in order to have any hope of future rewards.<sup>104</sup> This form of 'Gnosticism' was ultimately deterministic, Valentinus categorised all of humanity into three decisive types: 1) Unbelievers immersed in fleshly nature, 2)

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<sup>101</sup> Justin, *The Second Apology*, 7.

<sup>102</sup> *AH*, IV.37.4; *Dem.*, 11.

<sup>103</sup> *AH*, IV.39.1-2; V.3.1. Irenaeus' teachings on the advancement of the individual as the result of learning from experience now represent 'Irenaeus' Theodicy.' This solution to the problem of evil existing in the world of a good God relies on Irenaeus' understanding of necessary maturation. John Hick is one of the most widely known proponents of such a theodicy. For more on this philosophical adoption of Irenaeus' anthropology, see: John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 375.

<sup>104</sup> *AH*, I.6.4

Christians who live by faith and works, and 3) True Gnostics who possess the knowledge needed to bypass the lower aeons and return to the Pleroma.<sup>105</sup> The ‘elect’, those constituting the third category, were not required to engage in righteous acts. Even more pointedly, Irenaeus’ model of salvation entails a conspicuous measure of morality and, *a fortiori*, looks ahead to a time of judgment for the injustices that transpire in the present. In the same way that Irenaeus vindicates the martyrs by making physical bodies a prominent part of the Economy, he offers a sort of explanatory condemnation of all forms of social heresy by highlighting the importance of human choice and righteousness in the process of becoming perfected. To obey the commands of God is to choose good over evil, and to choose good is to embody the identity offered by Christianity.

Bowman identifies an analogous theme in the Book of Mormon itself: ‘The history Joseph Smith learned from these [Book of Mormon] stories linked the success of civilisations to their righteousness.’<sup>106</sup> In its epic tale of humanity’s oscillation between good and evil, one obvious message of the text is that ‘success comes...through commitment to God and humility before the commandments of Jesus.’<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, in one of Joseph Smith’s earliest revelations, the voice of Jesus Christ states, ‘And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves, for if they never should have bitter, they could not know the sweet.’<sup>108</sup> Then, in a somewhat desultory section of revelations, one reads,

No man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth [God’s] commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth, and knoweth all things...Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Pearson, 145. Pearson’s work is a helpful summary of the ‘family tree’ of ‘Gnostic’ movements during the first two centuries of the Common Era.

<sup>106</sup> Bowman, 35.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> BOC 29:47. It is interesting to note that Irenaeus (*AH*, IV.39.1) also uses the language of sweet and bitter (*dulcis et amari*) in his discussion of learning through obedience.

<sup>109</sup> D&C1835 82:4,5



Again, agency allows obedience to governing and beneficial precepts. In the early Mormon case, however, those commands ultimately became cosmological rather than divine. In his attempt to resolve heresy, Joseph Smith dissolved the ontological boundary separating divine authority from base humanity and, in its place, formulated a system of eternal advancement which perfectly reflects Berger's notion of cosmisation discussed in Chapter Two. As was mentioned earlier, the voice of God did not resound loud enough for the early Latter-day Saints; their exigent circumstances created a need for an objective, and even more incontrovertible, authority. As the early 1840s arrived, Smith began constructing a soteriological schema in which objective supremacy was assigned to the cosmos. Agency was not human; it was almost a natural law and the means by which individuals could exhibit commitment to the community and its method of progress.

Accordingly, Smith instituted a number of key rituals and ordinances during his last two years as prophet. In 1842, the Mormon founder invited nine men to the upper room of his Illinois store and ushered them through a new ritual in which he expanded earlier rites of anointings and washings by incorporating Masonic gestures and a narrative set in the Garden of Eden in order to more firmly link Mormon priesthood with the hope of divine communion.<sup>110</sup> In the ceremony, participants were given undergarments with important symbols cut into the fabric.<sup>111</sup> This ritual garb was then to be worn under everyday clothing from that point forward. The function of these garments should not be overlooked in relation to our discussion of obedience, commitment, and the mortal life. The ceremony integrated historical narrative,<sup>112</sup> physical embodiment through Masonic motions and the donning of the garments, and the emerging understanding of a celestial level of afterlife in which individuals receive 'all that the Father has'. Also, the rite served as a chance to advance in knowledge; the 'keys of the priesthood' were received during the ceremony, signs and gestures needed for passage into celestial glory. Those who received the 'keys of the

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<sup>110</sup> Bowman, 76.

<sup>111</sup> For a deeper look at the Mormon ceremony and its accompanying dress, see David John Buerger, 'The Development of the Mormon Temple Endowment Ceremony,' *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 34.1/2(2001): 75-122; Mark P. Leone, 'The Mormon Temple Experience,' *Sunstone* 3.6(1978): 4-7; and Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 198-221.

<sup>112</sup> Taysom, *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds*, 95. Taysom says that the garments tie '[participants] to the first scene of creation'.

priesthood' during the temple endowment ceremony entered into the vital core of Mormonism, from periphery to nucleus. Thus, the unique identity conferred by the narrative received a social intensification when Smith married it to a ritual in which secret knowledge was conveyed. Participants, therefore, left the event with advanced knowledge and a physical garment as a reminder, both resulting from the adherent's obedience to and participation in the ordinances of the church. Holy but tangible, historical but ever-present; the temple garments conserved and strengthened identity through this integration of individual faith and institutional dynamism.

The next year, in 1843, Joseph Smith offered two revelations which would permanently alter Mormon spirituality. He instituted the 'covenant of marriage', a belief and an accompanying ritual meant to 'seal' husband and wife together for eternity.<sup>113</sup> This notion of eternal marriage was introduced alongside Smith's first official endorsement of polygamy.<sup>114</sup> With these new ordinances came a greater and unequivocal, imperative, viz., that believers had no hope of exaltation without participation in the rites of the church. In fact, Smith's revelations explicitly connect observance of the marriage rite with the chance to 'be gods'.<sup>115</sup> By combining the precedent for polygamy set by Abraham and the chance to progress toward divinity in the same revelation, Smith seamlessly blended the past, present, and future in his pronouncements concerning marriage. Although he may imbue the historical context with an overly optimistic mood, Bowman's illumination of the original, social importance of these marital ordinances for the early Mormons comes close to expressing our own notion: 'The promise of sealing was that these familial relationships could become stronger than the whirlwinds of economy and society that tore them apart and would even, in the end, outlast death.'<sup>116</sup> Not only did the beliefs attached to the new rituals help support the system of progression developed by Smith, but additional rites meant additional requirements for each adherent, and each participatory act was an exercise in strengthening group bonds and consolidating power against the heresy that continually threatened to erode solidarity. The Plan,

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<sup>113</sup> D&C 131:1-4

<sup>114</sup> D&C 132:61-63

<sup>115</sup> D&C 132: 3,4,20

<sup>116</sup> Bowman, 78.

just as was true for Irenaeus' Economy, provided purpose by adjoining creation to redemption through participation. As Bowman articulately states, this was a movement 'through mortality and to divinity, gained through the experience of mortal life and through entering into the sort of holy relationships that the ordinances created.'<sup>117</sup>

## Future

That path toward divinity, however, appears to have no end for Irenaeus or for Joseph Smith. The present spills into the future as both parties emphasise the salvific efficacy of the process over and above any sense of a final realisation. As we explore soteriological schemas as products of the dialectic between experiences of heresy and emerging doctrines, it is important to recognise the permeability of that marker separating 'now' from 'later'. In our key passage from Irenaeus, outlining the Economy of Salvation, one reads that human growth occurs over 'a long period of existence' and 'a long course of ages'.<sup>118</sup> To possess the quality of the Uncreated, he says, one must continue as a being for a long period. In the same way, Joseph Smith told his followers,

But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned [the principles of exaltation]. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.<sup>119</sup>

We have already seen that Irenaeus and Joseph Smith understood the physical world and human flesh as crucial ingredients in their soteriological schemas, seeing the mortal life as an opportunity to progress through obedience and faithful resilience. Encountering hostility and social marginalisation may have readily cemented this rather positive outlook on the reparatory potential of perseverance and suffering, but those same agonistic experiences may have obscured the future as a wholly adequate recompense for the socially injurious punches thrown by a disapproving environment. However, the future was still assigned an important function within the schema as a period of vindication, manifested as both the reinstatement of justice and the ultimate

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>118</sup> *AH*, IV.38.3

<sup>119</sup> Joseph Smith, *King Follett Discourse*, n.p.

conquest of death for the righteous. Given the distinctive characteristics of the early Mormon's nineteenth-century American context, it is particularly unsurprising that they exuded high esteem for the future. The new republic's preoccupation with, and elevated hopes for, its place in the world still ringing in their heads, the early followers of Joseph Smith inaugurated a religious movement patently indebted to the millenarian fever spreading across the country. Subverting the norm, however, Smith 'asserted that the Mormons alone were the chosen people, not the American public, and that their development of a new social order, amid the apparent disorder of early nineteenth-century America, would hasten the Millennium.'<sup>120</sup> Hallwas and Launius add that this 'mythic perspective, which was held as self-evident truth by the early Mormons, bonded them to each other and explained their lives; it was the foundation of their identity.'<sup>121</sup> Although it may be more accurate to say that this regard for the future and Mormonism's role in hurrying its arrival laid a sort of cornerstone for an emerging LDS identity, there can be little doubt that the anticipation of a paradisiacal future inherited from Millenarianism lingered as a steady flame during the years of early Mormon doctrinal development.

### *Justice and Vindication*

Fundamental to that developing notion of the future was its assurance of ultimate justice and redress. Perhaps it is fitting that persecuted groups seek reparation and equality in their conceptualisations of the future. By placing such ideals just beyond arm's reach in the hereafter, the opposed and oppressed achieve alleviation of present hardship by interpreting experiences in relation to an optimal end. In other words, and without venturing into the labyrinth of psychological apparatuses at work, those groups that encounter the sorts of heresy that we have discussed might be expected to hold an ideal future as a kind of persuasive prize toward which both self and group must continually advance. Certainly, both the second-century Christians and the early Mormons expressed hope in a just future. *Tout court*, trusting in Christ's second-coming as the initiation of a period of judgment in which the righteous are rewarded and the wicked are condemned, is far

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<sup>120</sup> John E. Hallwas, 'Mormon Nauvoo from a Non-Mormon Perspective,' *Journal of Mormon History* 16(1990): 54.

<sup>121</sup> Hallwas and Launius, 5.

from unique to Irenaeus or to Joseph Smith. Both figures also inherited notions and texts that left unmistakable impressions on their developing beliefs. For instance, each presumably had access to and perhaps read scriptural passages such as Psalm 103:6 in which God is praised for bringing about ‘righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.’ In the case of the second century, Grant cogently argues that Christian writers of the time, such as Theophilus, reflected Stoic concepts of God as the ‘father of the just’ and ‘punisher of the impious’, exemplifying the influence of other philosophical schools on early Christian expectations of future judgment.<sup>122</sup> It is significant, however, that Irenaeus asserts, ‘...A share is allotted to all by the Father, according as each person is or shall be worthy.’<sup>123</sup> Even this claim echoes Justin, the latter stating that ‘each man receives eternal punishment or salvation according to the merits of his actions.’<sup>124</sup>

Still, Irenaeus articulates a more unique notion of final justice when, in the final chapter of his five-volume work, he suggests three gradations of reward for the righteous based on their earthly, meritorious actions:

Then those who are judged worthy of life in the heavens will arrive there, that is, in the heavens, others will enjoy the delights of paradise, and still others will possess the splendour of the city...Such will be the difference in dwelling for those who have produced a hundred for one, sixty for one, and thirty for one. The first will be raised into heaven, the second will live in paradise, the third will dwell in the city...Such, say the presbyters, the disciples of the apostles, are the order and the rhythm of those who are saved, as well as the degrees through which they progress...<sup>125</sup>

Here, Irenaeus expresses a belief that bears undeniable resemblance to the tripartite division of the afterlife promulgated by Joseph Smith. Davies writes that the significance of the three ‘degrees of glory’ in Mormonism ‘results from the dual wish to reward all according to their deeds, but also to differentiate between Mormon and Gentile’.<sup>126</sup> Without a doubt, Irenaeus is also attempting to establish righteousness as a group boundary marker, a litmus test for membership in the genuine Christian

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<sup>122</sup> Grant, *Gods and the One God*, 88.

<sup>123</sup> *AH*, V.36.2

<sup>124</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 12.

<sup>125</sup> *AH*, V.36.1-2

<sup>126</sup> Davies, *Meaning and Salvation*, 153.

collective in contradistinction to unrighteous ‘Gnostic’ movements. Beyond that, though, the second-century bishop underscores the importance of earthly behaviour within the Economy by linking incentive with the ‘order and rhythm’ of salvation.<sup>127</sup> Even though there is the potential for tension between the significance of the present and the glory of the future, it is balanced and harmonised in Irenaeus’ schema – it is true that present actions have future consequences, but heavenly compensation in the future also reflects the degree of progress over the course of one’s life. There is a sense that to grow in one’s ability to receive God now is to prepare oneself more fully for an eternity of just returns later.

A rather confusing revelation from 1833 presents an early Mormon understanding of justice and future reward.<sup>128</sup> Believers are encouraged to remain passive and honourable when faced with danger. With each successive attack, the Mormons are reassured that passivity will be rewarded even more abundantly in the future, and the decision to spare one’s enemy is designated a ‘righteous’ choice. This particular revelation is enlightening because in it we encounter Smith’s nearly incessant concern with violent persecution against his community as well as a preference for passivity encouraged with the enticement of future redress. Even as the revelation appears to justify force used as self-defence (‘if he has sought thy life, and thy life is endangered by him; thine enemy is in thine hands, and thou art justified’), the general message seems to hinge on a sense of God’s ultimate, and eternal, justice. Much later, when one might expect the Joseph Smith of the 1840s to turn his complete attention to resistance of the increasingly violent heresy faced by his followers, he wrote a letter providing directions for baptisms of the dead and reminding the Latter-day Saints that all righteous believers in history were persecuted; even so, ‘for all of this there is a reward in heaven.’<sup>129</sup> Much as Irenaeus had done centuries earlier, Smith held the present and the future in balance with regards to each period’s import in the Plan of Salvation. His reluctance to commit fully to a high view of the mortal life in place of future hope is quite striking given the prophet’s

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<sup>127</sup> For a study of how Irenaeus speaks of God’s gifts as rewards for worthy actions, see Adam J. Powell, ‘Irenaeus and God’s Gifts: Reciprocity in *Against Heresies*, IV 14.1,’ *Studia Patristica* 65(2013): 119-26.

<sup>128</sup> D&C1835 85:5. Also, 97:5

<sup>129</sup> D&C 127:4; 101:35

increasing focus on deification and ritual knowledge in the months preceding his death. Such hesitation not only reveals Smith's humanity by illuminating his position alongside (rather than above) other early Mormons who sought order by any means available in the midst of heresy, but it also points to the power of future goals within soteriological schemas for sustaining the stabilising mood of hope.

### *The Conquest of Death*

Hope, for those whose identity partially results from a martyrdom mentality, means more than trust in some future episode of judgment, it means that those physical bodies that have been slain unjustly will not have suffered in vain. Keeping in mind the present concern with soteriological schemas as overarching frames of reference, Mol incisively illuminates the challenge posed by death:

A system of meaning in which norms, values, permanency, and institutional arrangements are combined arises as a response to the need for unity and permanence. Death has to be fitted in the system, as it threatens to break down the unity of social relationships and the permanence of norms, quite apart, of course, from the threat to personal physical wholeness. And so death, as all the other 'breaks' in the social pattern (such as birth, marriage, the change from adolescence to adulthood), is everywhere carefully absorbed in a system of interpretation.<sup>130</sup>

We have already mentioned a number of the primary methods used by second-century Christians and early Mormons to rectify the deleterious social effect of death. In the preceding chapter, it was noted that Joseph Smith entered an extended period of personal crisis after the death of his brother Alvin. Just as many Christians have been plagued by consternation over the question of salvation for those who lived prior to Jesus' ministry, so Joseph sought reassurance that his brother was given a fair opportunity to embrace the truth needed for exaltation. As the Mormon leader introduced new rituals and beliefs, arguing for the permanency of spirit-matter and the worth of the mortal body, he constructed a system that bestowed 'power and authority over death'.<sup>131</sup> Facing the dual motivators of 'Gnostic' beliefs and martyrdoms in Gaul, Irenaeus articulated a related schema in which the flesh of humanity would be restored because it was in the flesh that the righteous persevered and in the flesh that Christ suffered and died.

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<sup>130</sup> Mol, *Meaning and Place*, 103.

<sup>131</sup> Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 56.

That being said, Joseph Smith employed a number of other strategies for confronting the deadly heresy that seemed to await the Latter-day Saints at every turn. In the same revelation listed in the previous section, promising a future reward for those who are persecuted, Smith explicated stipulations for baptisms for the dead.<sup>132</sup> In addition to extending the potential for exaltation to those who died before Smith finished restoring God's principles, the new rite connected past, present, and future by placing directive power in the hands of worthy adherents who could now utilise the mortal life to impact the future of past relatives. The early Mormon Plan of Salvation, however, took this sort of potent form late in Smith's tenure as group leader. Twelve years before laying out the particulars of baptism by proxy, Smith recorded the Book of Moses, an Old Testament supplement centred on the biblical character of the same name. Here, Moses hears God say, 'For behold, this is my work and my glory – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.'<sup>133</sup> Yet, God then proceeds to describe primeval events, effectively leaving the topic of eternal life as an insinuation that such an end-goal informed the entire process of creation. For the early Mormons, the implication that God ordered history whilst maintaining an awareness of humanity's ultimate need for immortality was undoubtedly comforting, but its open-endedness in the Book of Moses is starkly evident when contrasted with Smith's teachings in the 1840s.

The Book of Moses does, in a different way, illuminate Joseph Smith's early alertness to the threat of death. Enoch emerges as a major character in the book, one of only two Old Testament figures who avoided death altogether by being removed from earth by God in return for their faithfulness.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, the incorporation of Enoch into the Mormon text becomes more revealing when one recognises that both Enoch and Elijah receive frequent mention throughout Smith's revelations. The earliest of these, for example, cite Enoch as one separated from earth and preserved by God for a future day.<sup>135</sup> Although we can only speculate as to Smith's motivations for doing so, it seems highly significant that the Mormon prophet began to refer to

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<sup>132</sup> D&C 127:5-7

<sup>133</sup> Moses 1:39

<sup>134</sup> Moses 7

<sup>135</sup> BOC 48:14



himself as both Elijah and Enoch in the revelations presented to his followers.<sup>136</sup>

Smith seems to have had some affinity with various Biblical characters, for instance with the Joseph of the Old Testament, but invoking the names of Elijah and Enoch must have conveyed a twofold message: Smith was a trusted and faithful servant, and the Mormon Church restored the ancient link connecting such faithfulness to the defeat of death.

It is important to note that those are the same two points highlighted by Irenaeus in his own references to Elijah and Enoch. Of the former, Irenaeus says that he ‘was caught up in the substance of the natural form; thus exhibiting...the assumption of those who are spiritual.’<sup>137</sup> Enoch is also mentioned as an individual who was ‘translated in the same body in which he pleased [God], thus pointing out by anticipation the translation of the just.’<sup>138</sup> Irenaeus gave death an important function in the Economy as God’s logical answer to Adam’s sin, a necessary repercussion capable of reminding humanity of their inability to cope with immortality prior to progressing in God’s arranged plan;<sup>139</sup> however, he did not hesitate to posit the existence of divine power capable of rewarding the righteous and justifying the disenfranchised. Perhaps much more could be said of the way in which Irenaeus uses immortality (or the conquest of death) as a thread tying together his concerns with the regeneration of flesh, the slow maturation of humanity, and God’s bestowal of gifts as a loving recompense for obedience. Indeed, the bishop’s unique doctrine of Christ’s recapitulation as a second Adam who, demonstrating exemplary subservience, knowingly marches toward death in order to overcome it and restore humanity’s likeness to God, seems particularly poignant in the light of our notion of social heresy as religious opposition even against the physical wellbeing of those opposed.<sup>140</sup> As Mol predicts in the aforementioned quotation, death demands interpretation, and Irenaeus unequivocally elucidates its pivotal place within the soteriological schema.

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<sup>136</sup> D&C1835 50:2; 75:1-2; 91:5

<sup>137</sup> *AH*, V.5.1

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Minns, 65.

<sup>140</sup> In the light of this doctrine, it is quite interesting that early Mormonism began to label Jesus’ earthly ministry the ‘meridian of time’, its own sort of acknowledgement of the pivotal role of Jesus in the soteriological schema.

Space does not permit a fuller investigation of such motifs; nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that death predictably permeates Irenaeus' writings, from the infantile acts of the first humans in the Garden of Eden to the hope of incorruptibility in the *eschaton*. For the early Latter-day Saints, too, victory over death is a conspicuously pervasive notion. As Davies observes, 'Whatever psychological motivations influenced Joseph Smith, the obvious social fact is that early Mormons generated a symbolic, ritual and social world that fully engaged with death in a way that led to a sense of its conquest.'<sup>141</sup> When Smith gave his final speech in front of approximately ten thousand of his followers in June 1844, he fused perseverance, courage, and group identity with an expectation of eternal life and final justice by blatantly relating opposition to deification: 'Do not seek to save your lives, for he that is afraid to die for the truth, will lose eternal life. Hold out to the end, and we shall be resurrected and *become like Gods...*' (emphasis added).<sup>142</sup> This revealing statement supports our overall contention that heresy, when recognised by a religious collective, often requires resolution by that opposed group, resulting in the latter's formulation of a soteriological schema in which narrative is supplemented by behavioural admonishments and the future promise of godlike virtues. Smith's speech also hints at the significance of both group and individual identity within the belief system – each believer being required to exhibit absolute commitment to the collective task of protecting and preserving truth, roles engendered during (and for) the procedure of resolving heresy. This resolution process is remarkably observable in the case of Joseph Smith, and Barlow seems to grasp this fact perfectly when he describes the outcome of the Mormon founder's schema-constructing efforts:

As he built this kingdom, 'connecting' terms increasingly laced the Prophet's speech, some biblically sponsored, some borrowed from Masonry and elsewhere: 'kin' and 'kindred'; 'sociality,' 'friendship,' and 'association'; 'covenants' forming eternal alliances beyond traditional Christian notions; 'linking' and 'welding' together the generations; 'binding' and 'sealing' spouses and families; 'forging' a great 'chain' of connections; 'truth' as

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<sup>141</sup> Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 103. Note that Davies' book uses death as a lens for exploring Mormon spirituality in general. For a more recent book-length discussion of death as an interpretive framework for understanding early Mormonism, see Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>142</sup> Hallwas and Launius, 190-3.

indivisible (past, present, future, whatever its source, circumscribed into ‘one great whole’); the course of God and man as ‘one eternal round’.<sup>143</sup>

Both the community and its members, then, received their proper and interconnected place in the Plan of Salvation. Consequently, our analysis now turns to those identities and motivating social roles within the soteriological schemas.

### **Group and Self in the Soteriological Schema**

Summarising historian Gary Wills’ use of the term ‘ultra-supernaturalism’, Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd say that it refers to religious cultures that promote ‘a miraculous rather than a naturalistic worldview by emphasising the *permeability* of the boundary separating the spirit world from the natural world. (original emphasis)’<sup>144</sup> Seeing ultra-supernaturalism at work in Mormon origins, Shepherd and Shepherd agree with our own comments above, noting that such ‘beliefs serve to explain virtually every aspect of daily life...’<sup>145</sup> Going further, these social scientists argue that ultra-supernatural belief acts as a ‘lens’ for interpreting social conflicts as events in a cosmic battle between anthropomorphised spirits of good and evil.<sup>146</sup> As is elucidated throughout the present chapter, both second-century Christians and early Mormons appear to have developed such interpretive frameworks as a means of resolving religious opposition. If Shepherd and Shepherd are correct that these interpretations often entail the dramatisation of conflict wherein humans are given a role, then it is important to identify and discuss the identities involved in both the early Christian Economy and the early Mormon Plan.

The role of the individual believer within the soteriological schema is, in some ways, more readily detected than the function of the group itself. Speaking in terms of progress and advancement, language we subsume under the category of deification, Irenaeus and Joseph Smith propounded systems patently predisposed to personal application. Indeed, the identity of each community member is helpfully assayed by employing the concept of deification as the primary soteriological process by which every adherent receives meaning and an increasingly durable identity, the

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<sup>143</sup> Barlow, 49.

<sup>144</sup> Gary Wills, *Head and Heart: American Christianities* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007); Shepherd and Shepherd, 721.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 722.

soteriological self. However, the order and arrangement of salvation extends to, and requires, the collective community. Not only is a like-minded social unit necessary for legitimation of the ideas capable of resolving the shared agonistic experiences, but the solidarity engendered by heresy finds easy harmony in a common mission, the latter often emerging out of the group's freshly-expressed narrative.

### **Mission and Knowledge**

Recalling the dialectic between adaptation and identity (stability) outlined by Mol, and believing that these two historical examples maintained a balance in that dialectic, it may be beneficial to regard our preceding analysis of the two soteriological schemas as an exploration of adaptation (or resolution) and the following paragraphs as a brief note on stabilising identity. In much the same way that the motif of death permeates soteriological schemas in the latter's endeavour to resolve heresy, mission and knowledge seem to stand behind much of the purpose derived by opposed religious groups in their espousal of those schemas. In other words, the two concepts of mission and knowledge are keys for comprehending group identity in the complex soteriologies of Irenaeus and Joseph Smith. For the latter, in particular, the two terms go beyond solely heuristic purposes, cropping up in common idioms of the group. Of course, in the case of Irenaeus, the terms themselves appear less frequently but are more noticeably linked to one another; one critical mission of the church is to preserve knowledge in the form of true teaching.<sup>147</sup>

In summarising the first four books of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus says of his writings against the 'Gnostics',

...We have thus made known the truth and proclaimed the message of the church, which the prophets had already announced (as we have shown), which Christ perfected, which the apostles transmitted, from whom the church received it and, alone keeping it safe throughout the world, delivers to its children.<sup>148</sup>

This statement reveals a great deal about Irenaeus' perspective on the church's identity and role within the Economy as the guardian of truth, but it also serves as a fitting example of the way such a group mission stems from historical narrative as

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<sup>147</sup> As a result of Irenaeus' opponents claiming to possess secret *gnosis*, the bishop exhibits a bit of ambivalence toward the term knowledge. Even so, it is a useful concept for our own analysis of group identity and purpose.

<sup>148</sup> *AH*, V.preface; *Dem.*, 98. The same argument is presented, almost verbatim, in *Demonstration*.

well as betraying something of a social exclusivity among second-century Christians. Although we have chosen to give little attention to the notion of boundary markers in relation to social heresy, it is worth underlining the restrictedness included in Irenaeus' statement. His explication of the *regula fidei* and its preservation communicates an important idea to his opponents as well as to his fellow believers. The teachings he represents are the truth *because* they have been transmitted in the church through the ages. Thus, the elitism of the 'Gnostics' is combated with comparable but distinctive claims, and the societal heresy of the pagans (accusing Christianity of being a superstition) is also answered with an unequivocal appeal to history as authority. It is implied, then, that Christians are to be the upholders of right *knowledge*, an especially compelling notion when understood in the original, second-century context. Interpreting the mission of the church in this way was to fight fire with fire, denying the 'Gnostics' their very identity.

Mission, for the early Mormons, amounted to an obligatory objective. From the outset, Mormons were urged to evangelise and 'gather' the elect in order to hasten Christ's return. Initially, this mission entailed relocating converts to the American Zion, a place chosen by God as the New Jerusalem. After only two years, however, Joseph Smith produced a revelation that spoke of the LDS mission in different terms.<sup>149</sup> Members were no longer to think of Zion as a single gathering place of God's chosen people but were to establish 'stakes' of Zion, literally spreading their message over vast geographical expanses. Based on Isaiah 54:2, 'Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes,' this new revelation and the others that followed gave the early Mormons a sense of purpose coupled with a more flexible definition of group success.<sup>150</sup> As heresy intensified in the form of outsider hostility leading to scattered segments of believers, the movement maintained a joint commitment to the mission by transforming their expectations of a literal gathering into the figurative conception of a tent with numerous stakes – itself a striking portent of the all-encompassing soteriological schema that would arise to supply meaning for every facet of life.

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<sup>149</sup> D&C1835 86:4

<sup>150</sup> D&C1835 97:4; D&C 115:6

If Mol is correct in his postulation that charismatic leaders facilitate conversion by supplanting old identities with new ones,<sup>151</sup> then the success of early Mormon mission activity may point to Joseph Smith's ability to offer his followers a deeper sense of meaning. The notoriously ethereal topic of charisma is improved by Davies' treatment of 'super-plausibility', a concept briefly noted in Chapter One. As a transcendent, supra-mundane form of knowledge that supersedes that which was previously thought plausible, super-plausibility is that supreme sacred knowing offered by charismatic religious leaders.<sup>152</sup> With such a notion in mind, the relationship of conversion to knowledge becomes clear. The early Mormon mission, as much as it was an effort to convert others, was the bestowal of sacred knowledge and, in that way, a diffusion of Smith's charisma among those involved in spreading LDS teachings.

Thus, a large portion of early Mormon identity centred on the issue of knowledge. Taylor notes the predictability of this fact by arguing that Smith's forays into folk magic during his early years stemmed from a longing for divine knowledge that, after the founding of Mormonism, extended into the Plan of Salvation where humanity is to 'advance in knowledge and power by dealing with matter on the earth.'<sup>153</sup> In fact, Mormonism's founder refers to knowledge and learning with regards to progress and ultimate reward so many times that it would be difficult to list them all. In 1833, for example, he taught that those who obey God will be 'glorified in truth and knoweth all things.'<sup>154</sup> In 1843, he simply said, 'It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.'<sup>155</sup> Again, in his King Follett sermon, Smith repeatedly tied knowledge to salvation and, in more than one instance, to deification. One must recall, though, that the obtainment of knowledge was not restricted to personal endeavour but was accessed through the church. With the institution of temple ceremonies and his ongoing status as an active prophet, Smith circumscribed the sources of salvific knowledge and underscored the church's place as the restored

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<sup>151</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 45-6.

<sup>152</sup> Davies, *Anthropology & Theology*, 159.

<sup>153</sup> Taylor, 26.

<sup>154</sup> D&C 93:28

<sup>155</sup> D&C 131:6

conduit of such sacred wisdom. As the nucleus of the community, both spiritually and socially, the temple came to be a sort of *axis mundi*, controlling access to the rituals and corresponding knowledge needed for exaltation.

Of course, the possession of truth requires more than mere ritual and prophecy; it almost intuitively demands moral rectitude. For example, one thinks of the notion of magisterium in Catholicism, a concept that blends the authority to instruct with papal infallibility. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the early Mormons always perceived themselves as innocent; their own aggressive actions typically downplayed, and their opponents' actions often exaggerated. Their martyrdom mentality implied a certain moral quality that abetted the Mormon identity as purveyors of saving truth. This moral component was woven like a thread through time, tying nineteenth-century Mormons to models of righteousness such as Abraham and Moses. Innocence, in accordance with other virtues, supported the mission of the collective and suggested to those on the inside that nothing stood in the way of their advancement. After all, to grow in knowledge was to approach godhood:

We believe that God will continue to give revelations...until [the Saints] come in possession of all the truth there is in existence, and are made perfect in knowledge...When they are made perfect in one, and become like their Saviour, then [the Saints] will be in possession of all knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence: then all things will be theirs, whether principalities or powers, thrones or dominions, and, in short, then they will be filled with all the fullness of God.<sup>156</sup>

### **Deification: Place and Progress**

In order to comprehend the Economy as an ordered soteriology, it is important to return to our key passage from Irenaeus with which this discussion began. The above sketch of Irenaeus' soteriological schema surveys its organisation and intimates a form of group purpose prompted by the system, but Irenaeus also claims that God's Economy enables 'man, a created and organised being' to be 'rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God'. Thus, a closer look at individual identity is imperative; those whose lives receive meaning through the stability of the Economy inevitably take on the unique contours of the scenario that engendered the system as well as the self-definition imparted by the soteriology. Our study began by citing Irenaeus' poignant preface to his final book in *Against Heresies*. There, the reader is

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<sup>156</sup> Watkins, 209. These words were written by Orson Pratt, an influential figure in early Mormonism, in 1840.

encouraged to participate in the refutation of heresy ‘with the help of the celestial faith and following the only sure and true Teacher...who because of his immeasurable love *became what we are in order to make us what he is*. (emphasis added).<sup>157</sup>

Combining this statement with Irenaeus’ other comments on the nature of humanity (the possession of free will and the need for maturation), it is immediately apparent that this second-century Christian leader espouses a form of deification, a system of progress that is the outcome of human ontology and Christ’s recapitulative work within the divinely-sanctioned Economy.<sup>158</sup> What is more, individual faith seems to complement individual progress as a means for combating heresy.

Acknowledging the difference between our own sociologically-informed definition of heresy and the original usage of Irenaeus, whilst intentionally setting aside the theological/philosophical debates concerning different forms of deification, we see a connection between the social disturbances of religious opposition and the postulation of individual progress aided by commitment. This is as true for the early-Mormon case as it is for second-century Christians. Watkins is correct to describe Joseph Smith’s King Follett Discourse as the apogee of the prophet’s thoughts on ‘God, man, and godhood’.<sup>159</sup> The sermon explicitly affirmed the potential for humans to become gods, the culmination of Smith’s teachings on spirit as matter, pre-existence, and a multitude of gods. Our final concern, however, is with the personal meaning that such an idea extends to believers.

### *Deification, Asceticism, and the Soteriological Self*

To posit the divinization of the self is to choose one response to overt opposition and persecution. This may stand in contrast to some forms of asceticism in which the physical self is denied, but both are methods by which one transcends the agonistic circumstance. The ascetic acts upon his or herself, hoping to manipulate the environment by denying natural tendencies and drives, thus rendering external stimuli impotent. In contrast, the unique religious identity conferred on those within the soteriological schema, with its emphasis on world affirmation and the integral role of the material for the achievement of deifying potential, tends to be acted upon by the

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<sup>157</sup> *AH*, V.preface

<sup>158</sup> *AH*, V.6.1; *Dem.*, 12, 14, 22, 32

<sup>159</sup> Watkins, 214-15.



environment. One acknowledges the heretical and responds by assigning value to the experiences for the physical and spiritual advancement of the individual. This is not a passive orientation; the soteriological self still acts on and engages the world. The difference here is that the material realm is seen as an opportunity to participate in a salvific maturation process. In order to resolve the conflicts of life, one need not reject the mortal bodies or biological drives but must view these as sacred rather than corrupt. This is not to say that all, or any, physical impulses must be indulged; in fact, it is to propose quite the opposite. Sexual desires, for example, may need to be controlled in order to continue the eternal progress of the self, but those desires, far from evil, are also understood to be cosmologically or divinely legitimated.

Human reason, free will, and intelligence (whether understood as attributes made possible by providential mechanisms such as divine grace, Christ's ministry, the sacraments, and the Holy Spirit or as immutable components of a cosmological arrangement) receive emphasis as the means for resisting such temptations and choosing righteous behaviour. It is this path that is emphasised over and above the end itself. Asceticism also entails a sort of journey, the continual process of self-denial. Again, this process is perceived as essential for the resolution of conflict and increasing nearness to the divine. A key distinction, however, is in the emphasis of means versus ends. While asceticism often highlights the ends, groups with complex soteriological schemas entailing individual deification often emphasise the maturation process itself. This highlights one of the most common misconceptions concerning groups possessing divinization doctrines. They rarely focus on the attainment of godhood propagated by these doctrines, preferring to utilise the doctrine for other purposes, such as providing group meaning, mission, and morals. The individual must act righteously in order to progress. The parameters of what constitutes 'righteous' are determined by institutional leaders in the form of canonised texts, official pronouncements, and inherited traditions; though such parameters are efficacious for behavioural governance because the group as a collective provides legitimation. Thus, the soteriological schema, as a cosmological and objectively authoritative definition of reality, subsumes or supersedes the pre-existing interpretations (whether profane or sacred, secular or religious) and becomes the plausible basis for social relation. As one's identity often results from interaction with others, existence within a complex soteriological schema results in a

soteriological self, an overtly sacred identity made possible by the substructure of shared belief in natural and spiritual progress.

This focus on the present moralistic journey of the believer is by no means an innovation of the second (and certainly not the nineteenth) century. In fact, Straw's words on early Christian martyrdom quoted in Chapter Three appear all the more relevant here: 'Consonant with the classical honour code and its ideal of the good death, a martyr's confrontation with death distilled the essence of his or her actions and worth.'<sup>160</sup> The Greek hero was at least partially venerated because of a certain life lived. Martyrdom, likewise, did not point forward to eschatological hope but back to the way of life represented by the martyr.<sup>161</sup>

This raises an important point for comprehending the soteriological self. Hope, justice, and resolution are located in the present; they are lived. Although a future state of glory may be postulated and embraced as a component of the individual's salvation experience, it serves less as a motivation and more as the appropriate consequence or recompense for a life lived purposefully and prudently, not simply endured. In other terms, it was not enough for Irenaeus to profess that Lyon's persecuted Christians were going to be rewarded in heaven or for Joseph Smith to promise the same to his followers as their possessions were surrendered to the arson's flame. Persecution illuminated life and demanded meaning from present behaviour – namely, obedience. A death was labelled martyrdom only by virtue of the righteous loyalty exhibited by the martyr prior to this culminating event.<sup>162</sup> His or her willingness to follow the precepts of the community and its God cloaked the persecution in sacred significance. As Perkins notes, there was a ready-made place for suffering in a 'web of signification'.<sup>163</sup> Soteriological schemas are similar 'webs', lending supernatural meaning and existential amelioration to the lives and choices of the group and its members, irreversibly dissolving any partition between the supernatural and the believer's *Lebenswelt* so that spiritual activity is not perceived to

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<sup>160</sup> Straw, 40.

<sup>161</sup> Patterson, 124. Patterson includes an incisive discussion of the efficacy of martyrdom for the fostering of early Christian zeal as those killed represented the ideal life more than the ideal death.

<sup>162</sup> Even in the *Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons*, those martyred are said to have been perfected (*consummati*) in meeting such an end.

<sup>163</sup> Perkins, 137.

be penetrating ‘paramount reality’ but *is* reality. The soteriological self as an active role within the schema not only anticipates a possible symbolic death at the hands of opponents but also prefigures the obedience symbolised. By appropriating and applying the freedom of will, an immutable aspect of humanity, the self affects its own change. Following the commandments and ordinances, choosing the right, staying the course, these are hallmarks of a self working out its own salvation as well as the system by which it may do so.

### **God, Humanity, Resolution, and Adaptation**

In Irenaeus’ Economy, theology mixes with these elements of soteriology and anthropology; the three components are inseparable, creating a synergy necessary for the effective refutation of the Gnostics. In discussing such topics, he moves effortlessly from a Biblically-based creation account to Christological discourse and still further to an anthropological argument. Humanity was created in the image and likeness of God. In Adam, both of these qualities can be identified, though Adam was not perfect in any divine sense as a result of his having been created. Perfection, as Irenaeus sees it, is only for the Uncreated. Instead, Adam contained the perfection reserved for the created; namely, he possessed the ability to progress toward ultimate incorruptibility. The Garden was prepared as a safe haven for the growth that was inherent in the human experience.<sup>164</sup>

This soteriological plan, nearly paralleled in the evolving writings and trumpeted discourses of Joseph Smith centuries later, was more than an intellectual construct. Irenaeus and Smith both faced challenges and heresies beyond the philosophical arguments of their religious opponents. They encountered social marginalisation and physical persecution that threatened to break social bonds and, accordingly, necessitated a more pronounced vision for the community. Bowman eloquently addresses early Mormonism’s response: ‘The Mormons made of themselves a people...and [Smith’s] people became the society of which Joseph had dreamed: a firm rock in an unreliable world, a faithful community that itself became, in a way, the salvation its followers sought.’<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> *Dem.*, 47.

<sup>165</sup> Bowman, xix, 6.

Bowman's observation is perhaps more incisive than he realises, implying that one natural reaction to overt religious opposition is to relocate salvation from hypothetical hope to embodied actuality. Indeed, deification and the identity it engenders are captured quite well in the notion of embodied salvation, the soteriological self. We also concur that such a notion may arise as a means of resolving heresy and restabilising community life. As the previous pages have shown, anthropologist Mark Leone is correct to conclude that deification is common to many sects that originated 'in circumstances that were flexible, changeable, and often fragile.'<sup>166</sup> Leone also looks ahead to the concluding thoughts expounded in the following pages by noting that such belief systems (particularly that of the early LDS), themselves adapted to hostile experiences, tended to ensure future flexibility for the religious group:

A belief system built along side [sic] these...facts was influenced by them and as a result enabled a population to adapt better...It is under such conditions that religions developed that were geared to change and changeableness...Whatever, the historical case, Mormonism became a very flexible faith, one which has revised its institutions and even some of its beliefs since its founding, as it has encountered circumstances requiring pragmatic action.<sup>167</sup>

The pragmatism of which Leone speaks is important to note as our study turns to its closing thoughts. The affinity exhibited between religious groups facing heresy and soteriological schemas entailing deification hinges on a form of pragmatism. There may be little gained by speculating about the level of conscious awareness present in the formation of socially-stabilising worldviews, but there should be little hesitation in acknowledging the practicality of the heretical process in general, a system encompassing all aspects of social living (*habitus*, emotions, epistemology, etc.) and potentially capable of enhancing both dynamism and solidarity when they are needed most. Therefore, whether opposed groups are cognisant of the reasons behind their own affinities or not, the dialectic between belief and experience is, in a sense, markedly pragmatic.

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<sup>166</sup> Mark P. Leone, 'The Economic Basis for the Evolution of Mormon Religion,' *Religious Movements in Contemporary America*, eds. Irving I. Zaretsky and Mark P. Leone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 739.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

### SALVATION AND SUCCESS

A close comparative study of second-century Christians and early Mormons, the preceding pages explored the presence of an elective affinity between new religious movements that encounter social hostility/opposition and soteriologies involving deification. The purpose of the study, after adapting and applying the term ‘heresy’ to the tripartite conflict faced by such groups, has been to analyse and elucidate both the distinctive characteristics of the heresy as well as the types of social processes at work in each group’s efforts to resolve the conflict. Along the way, the sociological insights of the sociology of knowledge and the identity theory of Hans Mol have never been far from mind. Each strand of sociological theory contributes to our own understanding of the dialectic between experience and belief; the sociology of knowledge encapsulating the collective establishment of worldviews, and Mol pointing us to the motivations and propensities of individual believers in their struggles to maintain a firm grip on meaning in the face of confounding experiences. As was shown in the previous chapter, our two illustrative groups and their respective members successfully expressed and expounded identity-conferring soteriological schemas that integrated the heretical experiences discussed in Chapter Three. Ably exemplifying Mol’s sacralisation process, these soteriological schemas entail historical narrative, ritual, commitment, and future reward. Consequently, heresy is disarmed and transformed into a positive influence, the impetus to assemble a system capable of providing for the unique needs of the community.

Instead of soteriological schemas, our study could have referred to such interpretive frameworks resulting from the interface of doctrinal development and agonistic experience in terms of ‘cultures’ of salvation or ‘webs of signification’, but we have chosen to remain conversant with the nomenclature of theology.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, this is a sort of acquiescence to consistency (after all, we have chosen to use ‘heresy’ as an ideal type of religious opposition). On the other hand, there is an implied argument that social-science and theology have much to offer one another, an

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<sup>1</sup> Geertz, 89; Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 261. Geertz notably defined culture as ‘an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life.’ Davies fruitfully applies this same anthropological tool to his study of Mormonism whilst acknowledging the contested status of ‘culture’ as just such a device.

argument that belief is not painlessly divorced from experience. To adopt an anthropological term such as ‘culture’, would have been to risk losing the crucial emphasis placed on an individual’s progression by the soteriologies investigated as well as the centrality of the human body for those systems that result from experiences of physical persecution and death. Simply put, ‘culture’, even in Geertz’s understanding of a ‘pattern’ of symbolic meanings, is inclined to survey the object from too great a distance, sacrificing an awareness of conceptual contours in favour of a broad picture.<sup>2</sup> In our case, this might have led one to analyse a multitude of cultural elements held together by a soteriological core for both second-century Christians and early Mormons. Although arguably valid in its own right, such a daunting task would encounter numerous pitfalls – namely, ignoring the subtle similarities in the ways each party resolved specific forms of heresy whilst presenting a heavy-handed comparison engendered by the claim that each historical movement was an example of a culture dominated by notions of salvation. We have, however, attempted to approach our investigation by remaining intentionally committed to the former, illuminating subtle similarities in the resolving soteriological systems of these two historical groups. Just as Irenaeus and Joseph Smith emphasised salvation, so we have retained theological language in order to emphasise important social aspects of heresy and doctrinal development.

Accordingly, our preference for ‘heresy’ results from the helpful duality that the heresy versus orthodoxy debate within the theological arena offers for expressing the social tension between the destabilising effects of religious conflict and the corresponding attempts at resolution. Though it does not receive pride of place, the term ‘orthodoxy’ capably represents the resolution episode of the heretical process explicated in the preceding chapters. In this way, Walter Bauer’s thesis and the ongoing theological conversation concerning the development of heresy and orthodoxy both receive an unexpected adoption and appropriation; instead of debating the sequence of doctrinal formation, however, the present study demonstrated the comparable social formula whereby religious opposition (heresy) interacts with a group’s efforts to resolve conflict (orthodoxy).

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## God-making Heresy

Ultimately, setting up heresy as an ideal type of religious opposition allowed both a fresh analysis of some well-worn topics such as early Christian martyrdom and offered new insight into the social aspects of doctrinal development. As an ideal type, in Weber's original sense, heresy of the sort we have investigated is never perfectly found in the world of observable and obtainable data. At times, for instance, there may be no discernible delineation between social and personal forms of heresy whilst in other historical episodes it may be argued that religious opposition is always societal or always doctrinal. Indeed, these assertions largely depend on the approach and background of the observer, as he or she brings presuppositions and relatively unavoidable biases to bear on the topic. Even so, second-century Christians and early Mormons constructively demonstrate the heretical process; as collectives, they encountered, recognised, and resolved threefold opposition. What is more, their resolving soteriologies, entailing forms of deification, tied explanations of opposition to both group and individual identity. As each group adopted a martyrdom mentality, opposition came to serve a function in the maturation and growth of the believer. In the words of New Testament scholar David Horrell, 'It is through a process riven with conflict and opposition...that the process of "becoming Christian" occurs.'<sup>3</sup> For the second-century Christians, just as for the early Mormons, this potentially alarming reality was soothed by a soteriological schema in which each present hardship was interpreted as an opportunity to take another step on the path toward sanctity, a journey sanctioned by the past and fuelled by confidence in the future.

## Adaptability and Success

Perhaps unwittingly, each group also ensured a different sort of hopeful future through their effective, collective resolution of heresy. By formulating their beliefs in conjunction with agonistic experiences, the resultant systems possessed a signal measure of adaptability. On 8 July 1844, the *New York Herald* printed an article predicting the end of Mormonism following the death of its leader.<sup>4</sup> Eleven days earlier, Joseph Smith was fatally shot whilst imprisoned in a small jail in Illinois. The

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<sup>3</sup> David G. Horrell, "'Becoming Christian': Solidifying Christian Identity and Content,' *The Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches*, eds. Anthony J. Blasi, Paul-André Turcotte, and Jean Duhaime (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2002), 334.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Death of the Modern Mahomet,' *New York Herald* (8 July 1844): 1.

New York journalist who penned the words above could not imagine the future that lay ahead for the Mormons. The movement not only grew in size after making its pilgrimage to the far western territory of Utah, but continued to foster and propagate the beneficial identity engendered by their experiences during Smith's leadership. By 1882, prominent Mormon leader and political strategist George Q. Cannon could say,

The doctrine of 'the survival of the fittest', applies to us, and insures us a long, a prosperous, an uninterrupted and a glorious career. We can live in spite of adverse legislation, in spite of commissioners, in spite of governors, in spite of acts of persecution; we can live and still flourish, and still grow and still increase; and we shall do it.<sup>5</sup>

Even when one considers Cannon's context, the Mormons facing federal legislation that would demand that church property be surrendered to the U.S. government because of the unlawful LDS practice of polygamy, and disregards his acerbic rhetoric, his observation remains an incisive commentary on the suitability of early Mormon identity for future prosperity.

This, of course, is one of the corollaries and latent arguments of our study; arising out of challenging circumstances, soteriological schemas of the sort we have explored are necessarily well-suited to handling future heresy. A significant contribution of Mol's theory, as it serves as conceptual scaffolding throughout the present work, is its suggestion concerning the future prospects of religious groups who successfully strike a balance in the identity/adaptability dialectic. Mol believes that early 'Christianity survived [the first four centuries] primarily because of the looseness of the [empire's] social fabric and because it provided a fierce minority identity strengthened by both opposition and martyrdom.'<sup>6</sup> Yet, Mol recognises that his dialectical theory exposes a broader pattern. All religious movements must adapt to fluctuations in their environments whilst maintaining both individual and group identity. Of religious groups in the twentieth century, Mol argues,

The future therefore seems to lie with those religious commitments to order and identity that intricately and sensitively re-establish the social authority necessary for the safeguarding of pivotal social values (such as responsibility, charity, reliability, etc.) and yet involve sufficient individualism and personal

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<sup>5</sup> George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses* 24(25 June 1882): 46.

<sup>6</sup> Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, 38.



motivation to keep the motor of human existence humming with a minimum of friction.<sup>7</sup>

In the preceding pages, we have shown the soteriological schemas intimated by Irenaeus and Joseph Smith to be systems composed of such commitments, interpretive frameworks determinedly striving for a harmonious but adaptable equilibrium between self, group, and society. As was mentioned in Chapter One, both Mol's notions included above and our own postulations regarding the future success of those religious communities that articulate complex soteriologies in the face of heresy have much in common with Stark's thesis that successful religious movements must maintain a 'medium level of tension' with their social surroundings.<sup>8</sup> The contention is that there must be some controlled degree of flexibility as the new religious movement interacts with the greater world, often a world that appears hostile to that new community. For some social scientists, such as Stark or Kanter, this propitious trait of flexibility relates to various inbuilt commitment apparatuses; group members must feel connected but not depleted.

#### *Elasticity: A Synthetic Concept*

However, we have focused on the interplay between social heresy and belief, noting the beneficial role of soteriologies in providing for the social needs of the group. Consequently, our view of the relationship between adaptability and future success comes much closer to Davies' concept of a 'pool of potential orientations', an idea prompted by the biological idea of 'gene-pool'. Davies describes this phenomenon as 'a ready supply of differently emphasised doctrines which can be selectively utilised as occasion demands' but, in a later publication, he expounds the idea further:

It is advantageous for a religious tradition to possess, within its canonical sources, as wide a variety of potential orientations to the world as is consonant with the maintenance of an authentic distinctiveness. There is a period during the early growth of a religious movement when these orientations are brought together to form the essential features of the faith.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>8</sup> Stark, 144.

<sup>9</sup> Davies, *Meaning and Salvation*, 135; *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 248.

Such assertions rightly emphasise the multiform adaptability of religious belief, thus harmonising with the focus of the preceding pages. Davies' concept, however, stops short of describing that early phase during which 'orientations are brought together' in the construction of a symbolic core. If the pool of potential orientations refers to the dormant cells waiting to become branches of a tree as time passes and the supply of sunlight changes due to the expanses of competing vegetation, our own intention has been to turn the analytical gaze toward the health of the trunk itself. Soteriological schemas, as *Weltanschauungen*, derive from an admixture of inherited values, symbols, and novel experiences. In some sense, then, the soteriological framework that results from agonistic experience serves the future of the group by providing potential orientations. Born out of exigent and menacing circumstances, and intended to resolve them, the schema is intrinsically elastic and primed for the uncertainties of the future; potential orientations are not only available but are almost guaranteed a degree of salvific significance.

Instead of Stark's 'medium level of tension' or Davies' slightly cumbersome 'pool of potential orientations', it may be helpful to conceptualise the flexibility of a religious community with regards to safely maintaining identity even whilst adapting to the vicissitudes of social life in terms of religious elasticity. By elasticity, we have in mind a collective aptitude much like that expressed by Erikson: 'When one describes any system as boundary maintaining, one is saying that it controls the fluctuation of its constituent parts so that the whole retains *a limited range of activity*, a given pattern of constancy and stability, within the larger environment. (emphasis added)'<sup>10</sup> This accords with Bruce's claim that belief systems will not survive in the absence of institutional control mechanisms.<sup>11</sup> Often, such control mechanisms are endemic to the systems rising from the ashes of heretical experience. Religious elasticity, in fact, might be defined in such a manner, as the phenomenon in which religious groups elaborate soteriological schemas with intrinsic guarantors of adaptability and order. The difference between Bruce's view and our own may be immediately apparent, however. In the case of both second-century Christians and early Mormons, the soteriological schemas they put forward entailed institutional

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<sup>10</sup> Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce, 167.

control (e.g., the rule of faith and the necessity of temple ordinances) *in addition to* inherently flexible factors.

Thus, we diverge from other social-scientific understandings, such as that of Coser who refers to ‘elastic’ organisations as inclusive in contradistinction to ‘rigid’ exclusive groups or O’Dea’s similar delineation between two opposed strands of Catholicism, the ‘rigidity of overinstitutionalisation’ versus the ‘positive adaptive developments’.<sup>12</sup> This dichotomy between rigid and elastic is too simple. In fact, Coser notes that groups often respond differently to internal dissension than they do to external conflict, but he fails to recognise that the ability to apply different measures to different forms of opposition suggests some degree of flexibility even on the part of so-called ‘rigid’ organisations. Instead, one might propose a notion of elasticity much more in line with D. Michael Lindsay’s term ‘elastic orthodoxy’. In his study of evangelical Christians in America, Lindsay coins ‘elastic orthodoxy’ in order to explicate the curious tension between dogmatic conformity and culturally-beneficial associations with aberrant organisations exhibited by this Christian cohort:

Evangelicals embody what I call ‘elastic orthodoxy’. For a movement to succeed, you have to have some measure of unity; that, for evangelicals, is a core set of shared beliefs that are religious. Most evangelicals believe the same things about God, the Bible, heaven and hell, and who gets there. That provides a sense of cohesion for the movement. The other thing, though, that makes evangelicals unique is that they have an elasticity to this orthodoxy so that they can build bridges in very interesting and creative ways, so they have been able to build alliances with a whole range of different religious groups and with secular groups as well.<sup>13</sup>

Here, elasticity benefits the survival of the religious community by abetting its engagement with outside influences; the parameters of acceptable theological belief are stretched or suspended so that unexpected social affiliations become possible without the need to discard ‘truth’.

Sociologist Mathew Guest echoes Lindsay and translates the latter’s observation into language that even more suitably supports the concept of elasticity as a fitting description of social flexibility among religious movements: ‘Moreover, processes of ‘cognitive bargaining’, as believers negotiate their relationship with their

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<sup>12</sup> Coser, 99, 104; O’Dea, ‘Catholic Sectarianism,’ 53. On page 104, Coser also uses the term ‘elasticity of structure’ in his description of Church-type organizations.

<sup>13</sup> D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 220.

cultural environment, may best be theorised as *patterns of elasticity*, rather than a simple spectrum ranging from resistance to capitulation. (emphasis added),<sup>14</sup> In a sense, the heretical process as it was outlined in Chapter Two is an instance of religious adherents struggling to ‘negotiate their relationship with their cultural environment’, and the general aptitude for integrating social conflict exemplified by the articulation of complex soteriologies as well as the future adaptability made possible by the comprehensive nature of those meaning systems seems to expose collective behavioural patterns that are not sufficiently captured by terms such as ‘capitulation’, ‘accommodation’, ‘rigidity’, or ‘resistance’. Of course, this is also Taysom’s argument, mentioned in Chapter Two, concerning Mormonism’s recurring talent for pairing partial accommodation with an immediate reconstitution of social boundaries.<sup>15</sup> An apt example within early Mormonism is the elasticity exhibited in the group’s understanding of mission, an identity-conferring purpose highlighted in the previous chapter due to the light it sheds on the evolution of meaning in the course of experiencing social heresy. As Bushman notes, the early LDS notion of an American Zion was ‘an elastic concept that encompassed any place where the Saints lived under divine law.’<sup>16</sup> If one recalls the need for social support, or plausibility, in the maintenance of worldviews, then Bushman’s words imply that some framework of belief supplied sufficient conceptual space for the stretching of Zion; by some means, Zion remained a mobilising religious idea even after unforeseen circumstances necessitated its redefinition. This retention of identity and plausibility in the midst of straining experiences without either shrinking toward rigidity or stretching to a breaking-point is what we mean by religious elasticity.

It should be noted that elasticity is not a perfect description of the social process with which we are concerned. In fact, it could be argued that ‘plasticity’ comes closer to capturing the lasting impact of opposition on religious groups. Plasticity, however, does not encapsulate other factors, such as the presence of a permanently injurious threshold or the way in which soteriology can offer a sort of equilibrium, not by readying the collective for the next heretical jolt but by explaining the existence of opposition in the first place. Both terms (elasticity and plasticity)

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<sup>14</sup> Mathew Guest, ‘Religion and Knowledge: The Sociological Agenda,’ *Religion and Knowledge: Sociological Perspectives*, eds. Mathew Guest and Elisabeth Arweck (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Taysom, ‘There is Always a Way of Escape,’ 184.

<sup>16</sup> Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 176.

borrow from principles of physics, and both entail the deformation of an object as the result of external forces. With plasticity, the deformation is permanent, and, in a sense, the consequence of heresy on a nascent religious movement *is* permanent, at least for those cases in which the group survives the blow to their stability by articulating an altered understanding of salvation. Yet our preference for elasticity over plasticity derives from the overwhelming ability of such groups to achieve resolution at all. Their beliefs change in some way, thus they may be permanently affected; but the complex soteriological schema is itself a way to restore balance, both in the face of present heresy and in anticipation of future opposition. Religious elasticity, as an analytical tool, acknowledges that agonistic forces can stretch a meaning system too far whilst also highlighting the nearly incessant presence of tension. In a manner of speaking, plasticity envisions a group whose encounters with resistance left perceptible scars; healed and surviving, the community remains just as malleable as ever; this is no dubious analogue. Yet, elasticity offers an alternative; elastic religious communities successfully confer identity and meaning on their members by maintaining tension, allowing exogenous influences to elongate the structure of the group when necessary and contract when necessary. Plasticity calls to mind images of meteors crashing into planets; craters lastingly marking those historical encounters. Elasticity conjures the image of a taut rubber band virtually able to contract or to expand at any moment as external (and internal) forces make their impact, a phenomenon we have seen in conflict situations.

### **A Note on Persecution and Deification**

Among the early Christians, the exigencies of such conflict and persecution that formed an affinity with deifying elements of salvation eventually ceased their assault. Ideas resembling those proposed by Irenaeus remained during the third century, undoubtedly tied to the widespread persecutions authorised by Decian and, later, Diocletian.<sup>17</sup> However, with the edict of Milan in 313, sanctioned persecutions stopped, and the next few decades witnessed the instalment of Christianity as an authoritarian power in the empire. As Bowersock notes, the notion of Christian martyrdom as a distinct identity required Roman polytheism in order to flourish in the

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<sup>17</sup> Cyprian, *The Treatises of Cyprian*, I.1-2. Cyprian, writing in the aftermath of the Decian persecutions, shares Irenaeus' view that Adam and Eve were simply 'inexperienced souls' as well as the belief that the earthly life of humanity allows one to 'advance in his walk towards salvation'.

years prior to Constantine.<sup>18</sup> Once the empire turned amenable to Christianity, there was a corresponding turn in the west from the high theological anthropology championed by Irenaeus and others wherein the present was esteemed as a divinely-reinstated chance for progress to alternative, low anthropologies emphasising the corrupt nature of humanity. In a sense, antagonism seems to have curved inward and led to forms of asceticism.

For Mormonism, too, a similar transition is apparent in the way that the movement embraced what White calls Mormon ‘Neo-Orthodoxy’ during and after the world wars of the early twentieth century. According to White, shortly after Mormonism disavowed polygamy and Utah was granted statehood, the LDS community began to view God as sovereign and humanity as depraved and in need of grace.<sup>19</sup> This development, however, was in many ways a return to the Mormon theology of 1830 to 1835 as opposed to the more innovative doctrines of Smith’s later years. As seems to be the case with early Christianity, notions of individual progress and deification coincided with acute persecution and social marginalisation during the years of 1835 to 1844. When these agonistic currents subsided, and full assimilation became a reality, so the tendency to place salvation in the present and to focus on the potential for personal progress subsided. In each of these historical examples, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the persistence of theological concepts centred on the spiritual development of individual believers. We can state quite confidently that the Christian Church has firmly held to such notions even into the twenty-first century. Whether it is described in terms of justification, sanctification, Christian perfectionism, or the more general expression of spiritual maturity, there has always existed some theological contention that God bestows providential and transformative gifts on his chosen people. Here, we simply note the apparent change in anthropological focus that accompanied the waning of exogenous opposition against our two illustrative parties.

### **Further Study**

In a study as broad and multifaceted in scope as the present work, there are almost innumerable possibilities for further research. Our analysis was largely built

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<sup>18</sup> Bowersock, 39, 56.

<sup>19</sup> White, xix-xxi.

on the two pillars of heresy as an ideal type of religious opposition, and an exploration of the elective affinity between new religious movements facing opposition and their espousal of deifying soteriologies. Using these two topics as our guide, it is possible to underline a number of research areas that would benefit from additional scrutiny. With regards to heresy as an analytical tool, our own attempt to provide a sociologically-informed definition was limited by the related need to sketch the contours of both the theological discussion of heresy and orthodoxy as well as existing sociological uses of those terms. In order to demonstrate more convincingly the salience of 'heresy' for religious studies, thus removed from the theological arena, one needs to highlight the aspects of studies such as our own that directly resulted from the heresy paradigm and compare such findings to similar studies for which the preferred method was sociology of deviance, conflict theories, deprivation theories, etc. In other words, because one of our chief aims was to propose heresy as a helpful tool for those outside of theology, future work is needed to clarify its value and/or illuminate the inherent shortcomings of alternative, but imprecise, terms such as opposition. In effect, we turned the traditional notion of heresy as deviation from within - a perspective that naturally benefits from methods focused on the heretics themselves - on its head, preferring to study heresy as an external force and, therefore, directing the attention on the behaviours and responses of the group that faced the opposition. In doing so, we opened the door to studies of solidarity-strengthening practices and issues of doctrinal development within religious groups facing intense social pressures. For our analysis of early Christians and early Mormons, then, defining heresy in this way allowed us primarily to focus, not on the motives of the heretic, but on the resolution of the heresy.

Quite naturally, therefore, the present study invites future research on other historical examples of persecuted religious movements. Although we have continuously affirmed that deification is far from an inevitable postulation in the face of opposition, it would be both interesting and enlightening to explore the measures employed by other groups in their struggles to safeguard identity against deleterious external forces. Our own approach of juxtaposing two disparate groups did, in the end, lend a great deal of insight into the similarities of the social pressures faced by each; nevertheless, future studies might prefer to limit the focus to one community (perhaps, even utilising ethnographic methods) so that adequate space is available for a full explication of beliefs as well as multiple examples of doctrinal developments

during the period of acute opposition. Such an approach would also create opportunities for collaborative work, bringing theologians and social scientists together.

In fact, as the preceding pages suggest, the now nearly-forgotten theoretical insights of Hans Mol remain quite apposite for such interdisciplinary endeavours, serving as a well-conceived middle ground between theories focused on social structure and theories emphasising individual agency as well as avoiding the blatant determinism which often deters theologians. Our own exploration of religious opposition and its interface with soteriology certainly benefitted from Mol's theoretical framework; perhaps his ideas deserve a reassessment for the twenty-first century as discussions of identity now pervade religious studies and multidisciplinary research is lauded as the way forward for humanities and social sciences. Mol intentionally established a theory of identity meant to capture broad data and explain both individual and group actions, a theory as amenable to the religious believers themselves as it was workable for sociologists. Although his work has shortcomings, it does spotlight religious identity from a unique angle, illuminating the relationship between the network of commitment, objectivity, ritual, and myth on the one hand, and the desire for social stability on the other. In our view, and in our study, this theoretical scaffolding admirably highlights the manner by which religious movements seek to provide themselves with meaning, purpose, and stability, safeguarding and ensuring identity in the face of what they perceive as threats to all three.

The present study successfully engages the histories and teachings of two such movements during the early stages of doctrinal evolution, prior to the canonisation of belief. However, the historical record limits the number of such cases available for scholarly inquiry. That being so, future analysis could either direct attention to later, historical stages in the groups' growth or could focus on contemporary movements. Possibilities abound for the latter; the scholar's gaze could just as fruitfully fall on anything from persecuted Christians concentrated in specific geographical regions (China, perhaps) to tensions between Islamic sects to the stigmatisation of otherwise benign 'alternative religions' (e.g., Wiccans or Neo-Pagans) of the twenty-first century. Exploring social heresy and its relationship to beliefs among contemporary religious communities would also allow the application of qualitative and ethnographic methods, potentially balancing the nearly unavoidable, though



regrettable, sense of detachment projected by abstract sociologically-based studies. With that in mind, and recognising the particular relevance of such an acknowledgement for our study of the way suffering became the source of identity and salvation for early Christians and early Mormons, we end with John Bowker's poignant thought:

There is nothing theoretical or abstract about it. To talk of suffering is to talk not of an academic problem but of the sheer bloody agonies of existence, of which all men are aware and most have direct experience. All religions take account of this; some, indeed, make it the basis of all they have to say. Whatever theoretical constructions may be built, the foundations are laid in the apparent realities of what it is like to be alive.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 2.

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